

FOOTNOTES IN GAZA

ALSO BY JOE SACCO

But I Like It

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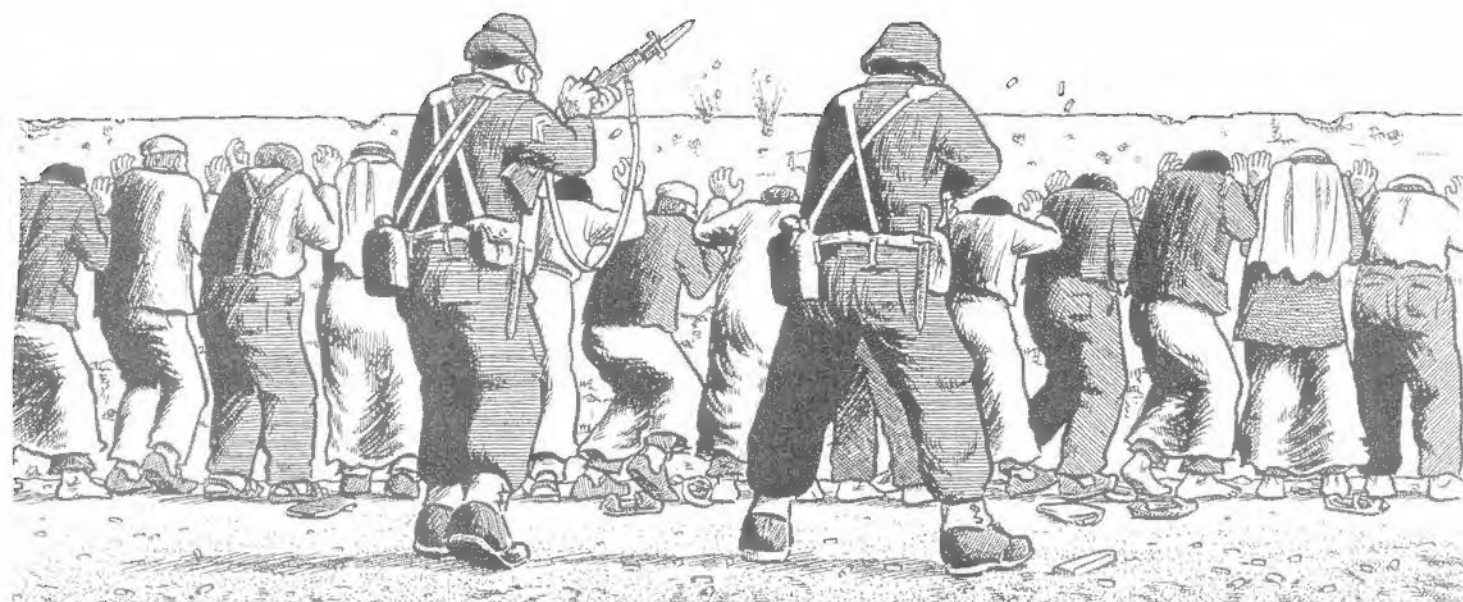
Notes from a Defeatist

Safe Area Goražde: The War in Eastern Bosnia 1992–95

Palestine

FOOTNOTES IN GAZA

JOE SACCO



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To the people of Gaza

FOREWORD

The genesis for this book dates to the spring of 2001 when the journalist Chris Hedges and I prepared to go on assignment to the Gaza Strip for *Harper's* magazine, he as a writer with me as illustrator. We had decided to focus on how Palestinians in one town—Khan Younis—were coping during the early months of the Second Intifada against the Israeli occupation. I recalled a reference I'd read many years before in Noam Chomsky's book *The Fateful Triangle*—basically a short quote from a United Nations document—about a large-scale killing of civilians in Khan Younis in 1956, and Chris agreed that we should add this barely noted historical episode to our story if it turned out to have some validity and current resonance.

Once in Khan Younis, we devoted about a day to gathering eyewitness testimony to what had happened in the town in November 1956 during the Suez Canal Crisis, when Israeli forces briefly occupied the Egyptian-ruled Gaza Strip. Old men and women had stark stories to tell about their fathers and husbands being shot in their houses or being lined up in the streets and killed by Israeli soldiers. One of those we interviewed was Abed El-Aziz El-Rantisi, a senior official of Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Party (who was later assassinated by an Israeli missile). El-Rantisi, who in 1956 was nine years old, told us his uncle had been killed that day. "I still remember the wailing and tears of my father over his brother," he said. "I couldn't sleep for many months after that. . . . It left a wound in my heart that can never heal. I'm telling you a story and I'm almost crying. This sort of action can never be forgotten. . . . [T]hey planted hatred in our hearts."

Chris deemed what had happened in Khan Younis in 1956 a significant part of the town's history, and he included several paragraphs about it in the *Harper's* article. For whatever reason, that section was cut by the magazine's editors.

I found that galling. This episode—seemingly the greatest massacre of Palestinians on Palestinian soil, if the U.N. figures of 275 dead are to be believed—hardly deserved to be thrown back on the pile of obscurity. But there it lay, like innumerable historical tragedies over the ages that barely rate footnote status in the broad sweep of history—even though, as El-Rantisi alluded, they often contain the seeds of the grief and anger that shape present-day events.

To me, the story of the Khan Younis killings was not so easily dispensable. I had done some digging, and almost nothing had been written in English about the episode. I determined to go back to Gaza to research what had taken place in 1956. As I prepared, I began to learn more about another incident that had occurred around the same time, on November 12, in the neighboring town of Rafah, in which scores of Palestinian men were killed. What had happened there? Again, a couple of sentences in a U.N. report were all that saved the incident from outright oblivion. In some ways,

the Rafah story began to interest me more. The violence done in Khan Younis was shocking and brutal but, as I ascertained on my initial trip to Gaza with Chris, very straightforward; the killings in Rafah took place over a daylong screening operation for Palestinian guerrillas and soldiers. How had more than 100 people died in what should have been a standard, if complicated, military procedure? Had Israeli soldiers simply “panicked and opened fire on the running crowd,” as the U.N. report surmised? Creatively speaking, there were more layers to investigate with the Rafah story, more pieces of a puzzle to put together. In addition, almost all the men of military age were caught up in the sprawling Rafah incident and many survivors would still be alive; at Khan Younis, only a handful of those involved survived being lined up and shot. So this book is broken up into two major though uneven sections—one about Khan Younis and the other, considerably longer, about Rafah.

Most of the on-the-ground field research for this book took place during two trips to the Gaza Strip between November 2002 and March 2003. My main priority was to record the stories of Palestinian eyewitnesses to the events in Khan Younis and Rafah. But 50 years is a long time to wait before asking people what they remember about a particular day. Thus the recollections reproduced here have been scrutinized in light of an inevitable blurring of memory and are compared in their details: Did the survivors recall essentially the same thing? Documentary evidence is usually considered more reliable than oral testimony by historians, but the record is scant and certain unsavory orders and reports are often kept “off the books” or are stored out of reach of even the most diligent researcher. Egyptian military records are closed to most inquiries. Certain U.N. records in Jordan and elsewhere that might shed some light are near unreachable. Still, it was important that available avenues be explored, and to this end I employed two Israeli researchers to go through the Israel Defense Forces archives. One of them also examined the Israel State Archives, the Knesset Archives, a press archive, and the *Kol Ha'am* (Communist Party) newspaper archive for any mention of the two incidents. Translations of key records and a list of Israeli historians and significant personnel consulted are included in the appendices at the end of the book. My hope is that this account will prompt former Israeli soldiers who might have witnessed the events in 1956 to offer their own recollections and points of view. Perhaps an Israeli historian needs to step into the breach.

Besides the problems inherent in relying on memories, addressed more fully in the book, the reader should be aware that there is another filter through which these stories passed before reaching the page, namely my own visual interpretation. In essence, I am the set designer and the director of every scene that takes place in the 1940s and 1950s. In reconstructing what the towns and refugee camps of Gaza looked like, I relied heavily on photographs available at the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) archives in Gaza City. I also drew on physical descriptions related to me by Palestinians. Still, any act of visualization—drawing, in this case—comes with an unavoidable measure of refraction.

My research did not take place in a vacuum. While I was investigating what had happened in 1956, Israeli attacks were killing Palestinians, suicide bombers were killing Israelis,

and elsewhere in the Middle East the United States was gearing up for war in Iraq. Among the most critical developments in the daily lives of Gazans at the time was the wide-scale demolition of Palestinian homes in Rafah and Khan Younis, which made its way into the fabric of this book. (Interviews with Israeli military personnel for their take on the matter can be found in Appendix 2.) However, even the present-day stories I tell here quickly fell under the category of history because the situation in Gaza has undergone two major changes since I started this project almost seven years ago.

First, in 2005, Israel unilaterally dismantled all the Jewish settlements in Gaza and left the small sliver of land entirely to its Palestinian inhabitants. However, Israel still tightly controlled Gaza's airspace, coastline, and its entry and exit points save one. (That one was the Rafah terminal, with access to Egypt, which severely limited movement to and from Gaza.) In effect, the Gaza Strip, overcrowded and destitute, had not been freed from the Israeli clamp or the threat of withering attack or retaliation by Israeli forces, as witnessed in the winter of 2008–9.

Second, in 2007, the Islamic group Hamas seized control and has been in charge of Gaza ever since. Hamas, branded a terrorist organization by Israel and the United States, had won the majority of legislative seats in a 2006 election. A national unity government with its rival Fatah was unacceptable to the Israelis, who further tightened the screws on Gaza. When tensions between Fatah and Hamas boiled over, Hamas preemptively seized Gaza ahead of a U.S.-engineered coup by Fatah. What shocked Palestinians, even those disgusted with years of corruption under Fatah rule, was the ruthlessness with which Hamas crushed its Fatah opponents. The tradition of Palestinian militants, regardless of faction, standing shoulder-to-shoulder against Israel and not against each other was at an end. With the Hamas takeover, Israel declared the Gaza Strip an "enemy entity." The blockade of Gaza, which was joined by the United States and the European Union, is, at this writing, almost complete.

As someone in Gaza told me, "events are continuous." Palestinians never seem to have the luxury of digesting one tragedy before the next one is upon them. When I was in Gaza, younger people often viewed my research into the events of 1956 with bemusement. What good would tending to history do them when they were under attack and their homes were being demolished *now*? But the past and present cannot be so easily disentangled; they are part of a remorseless continuum, a historical blur. Perhaps it is worth our while to freeze that churning forward movement and examine one or two events that were not only a disaster for the people who lived them but might also be instructive for those who want to understand why and how—as El-Rantisi said—hatred was "planted" in hearts.

Joe Sacco
July 2009

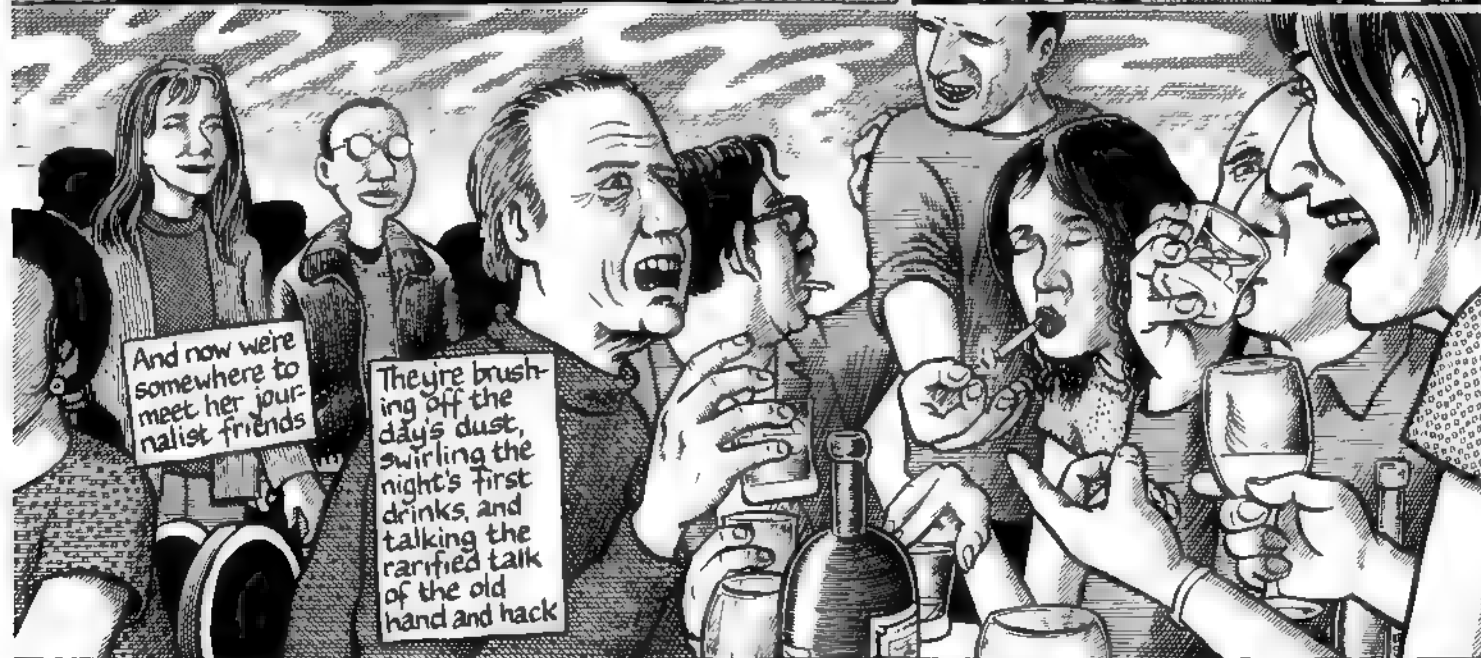
FOOTNOTES IN GAZA

KHAN YOUNIS

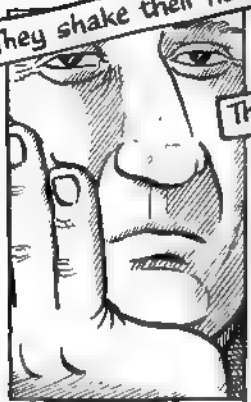


GLIMMER OF HOPE

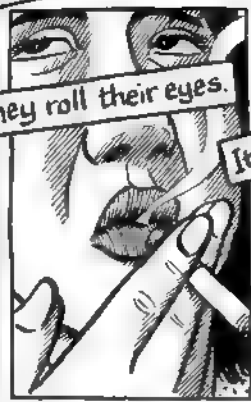




They shake their heads



They roll their eyes.



It does get old



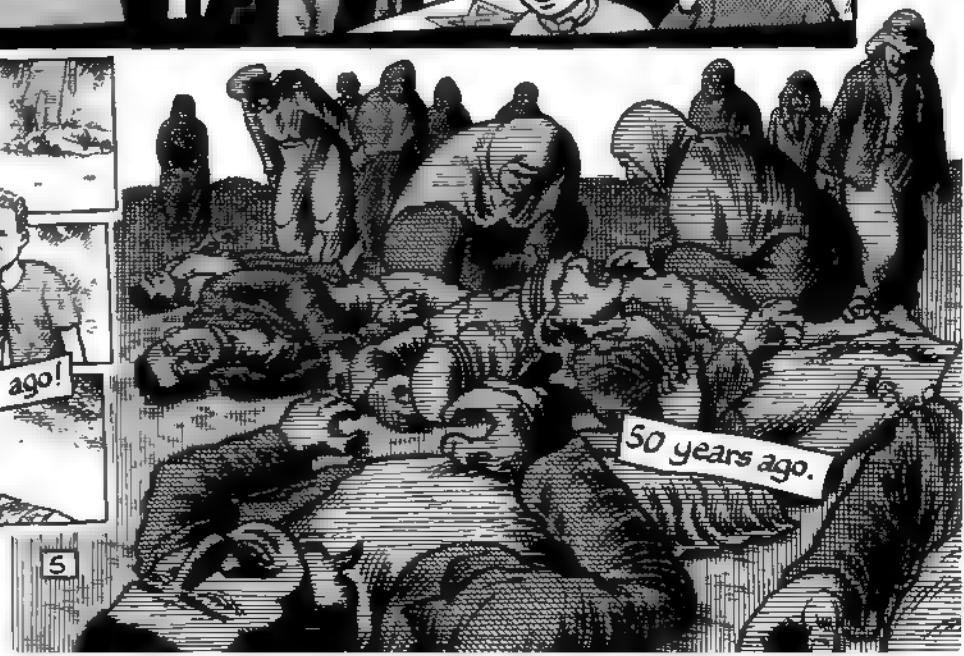
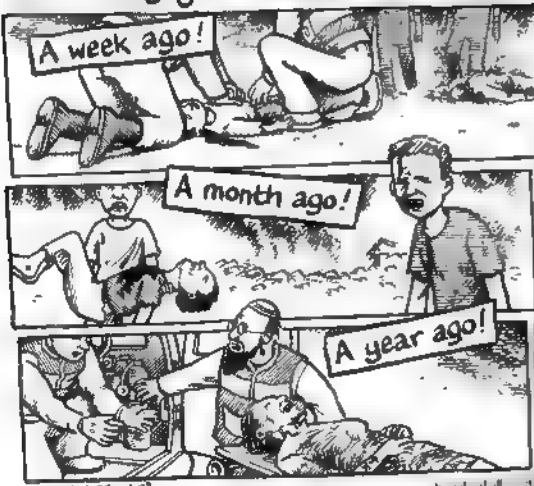
Waitress!

What's on the menu?



They could file last month's story today - or last year's, for that matter - and who'd know the difference?

Because they've wrung every word they can out of the Second Intifada, they've photographed every wailing mother, quoted every lying spokesperson, detailed every humiliation - and so what?







This is the story of footnotes to a side-show of a forgotten war.

FOOTNOTES

The war pitted Egypt against the strange alliance of Britain, France, and Israel in 1956;

the sideshow was the on-going raids and counter-raids across the Gaza border by Palestinian guerrillas and Israeli forces;

and the foot-notes—

Well, like most foot-notes, they dropped to the bottom of history's pages, where they barely hang on.

History can do without its footnotes.

Footnotes are inessential at best; at worst they trip up the greater narrative.

From time to time, as bolder, more streamlined editions appear, history shakes off some footnotes altogether.

And you can see why...

History has its hands full.

It can't help producing pages by the hour, by the minute.

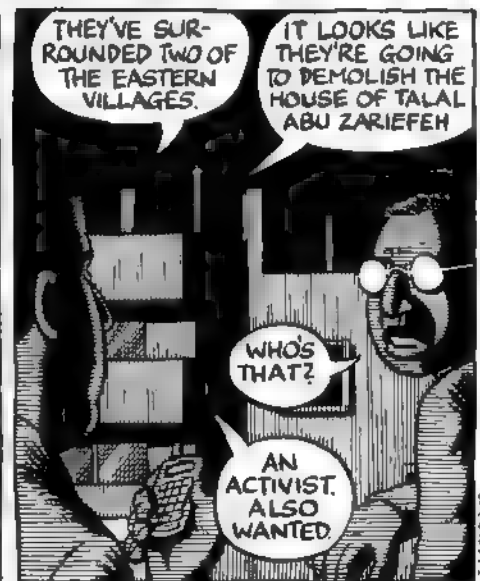
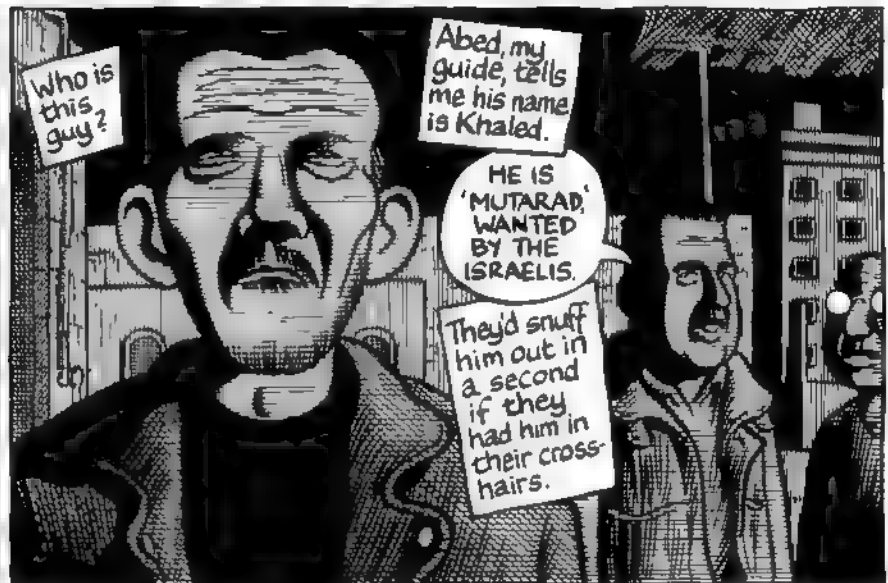
History chokes on fresh episodes and swallows whatever old ones it can.

The war of 1956?

Huh?

Here we are tonight, for instance, in Gaza, with Israeli pilots circling above us and a Palestinian I have just met checking his Browning down below.







ABED

You sort of forget what it's like till you're here again, and then it all comes back to you in a swirl of dust and a tornado of children.

WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

HELLO! WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

Christ almighty, not this again!

WHA YOUR NAME

They don't see many outsiders here in southern Gaza, which makes me exotic, sometimes golden.

Then again, sometimes my presence elicits discomfort, suspicion, perhaps tinged with humiliation.

THEY'RE USING US FOR LAUGHS

I was once one of three in the backseat of a taxi that stopped for a couple more passengers...



one of whom tried to squeeze in next to me—



but the driver would have none of it.



CAN'T YOU SEE HE'S A FOREIGNER?!

Who am I, after all, snooping around, taking photos, wanting names?

SOMEBODY FROM THE JEWS WILL GET YOUR BOOK AND READ MY NAME AND MY ADDRESS... AND THEY WILL COME HERE IN THE NIGHT AND—

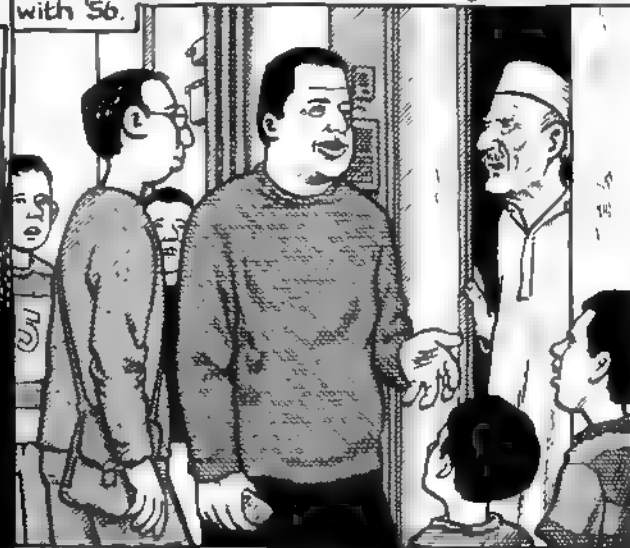


—and demolish your house?

"If they demolish your house," I say, "I promise I will buy you a new one!"



Generally speaking Abed sets people at ease about me and answers raised eyebrows with a smooth and soon-to-be-rote explanation about my obsession with '56.



One day we watch a video from that era.

In it, Israeli vehicles charge defiant Palestinian teenagers who leap out of the way and let loose a torrent of stones

A nostalgic Abed tells me the first Intifada was truly a popular uprising.

Abed is one of the many Palestinians angered by the agreements the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) made with Israel starting in 1993, known as the Oslo Accords, which ended the First Intifada and returned Yasser Arafat and the old-guard Palestinian leadership from exile in Tunisia.

OSLO [CREATED] A KIND OF HYSTERIA.

PEOPLE STOPPED THROWING ROCKS AT THE ISRAELIS AND STARTED THROWING OLIVE BRANCHES

BUT WE GOT NOTHING FROM OSLO

Although Israeli soldiers mostly withdrew to their fixed positions, the overall occupation continued and the number of Jewish settlers on occupied land doubled.

DURING THE FIRST INTIFADA, I USED TO THINK WE WERE A GREAT PEOPLE

NOW I DON'T

OUR LEADERS, WHEN THEY WERE IN TUNIS, WERE LIKE HEROES TO US

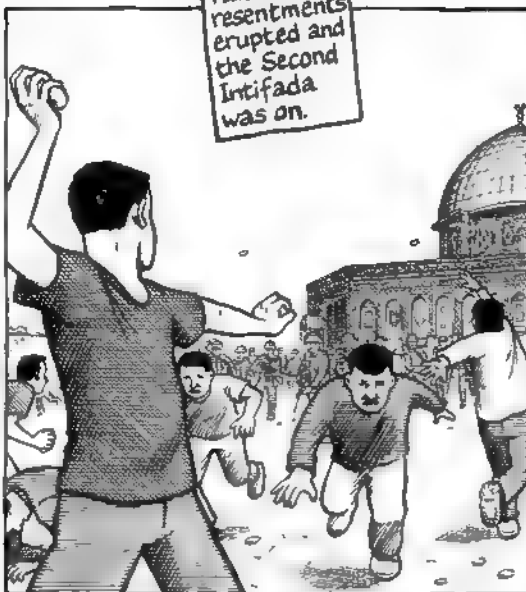
AFTER OSLO, WHEN THEY CAME HERE, WE SAW THEM FOR WHAT THEY ARE.

THEY PUT THEIR PRIVATE CONCERNS ABOVE THE NATIONAL CAUSE.

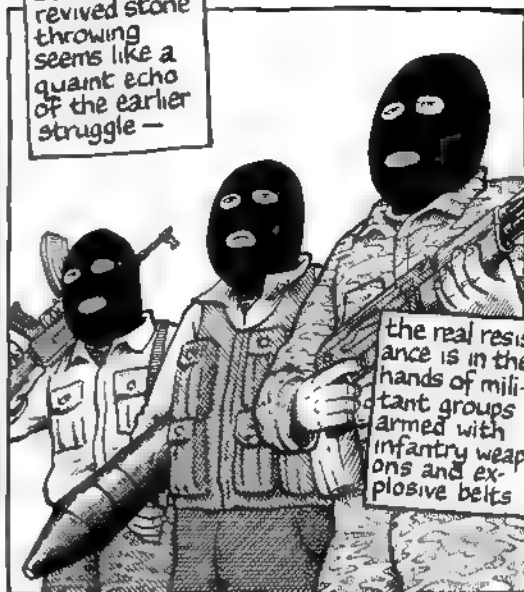
THE PEOPLE ARE THE ONES WHO SACRIFICED, AND WHAT THEY CARE ABOUT IS GOING TO TEL AVIV FOR A GLASS OF WINE AND TRAVELING AROUND FREELY.

The uneasy "Oslo period," straining under the weight of the interminable occupation and the phenomenon of suicide attacks on Israeli civilians, ended after Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon's provocative visit in September 2000 to Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, which is also the site of the Jewish Temple Mount.

Simmering Palestinian resentments erupted and the Second Intifada was on.

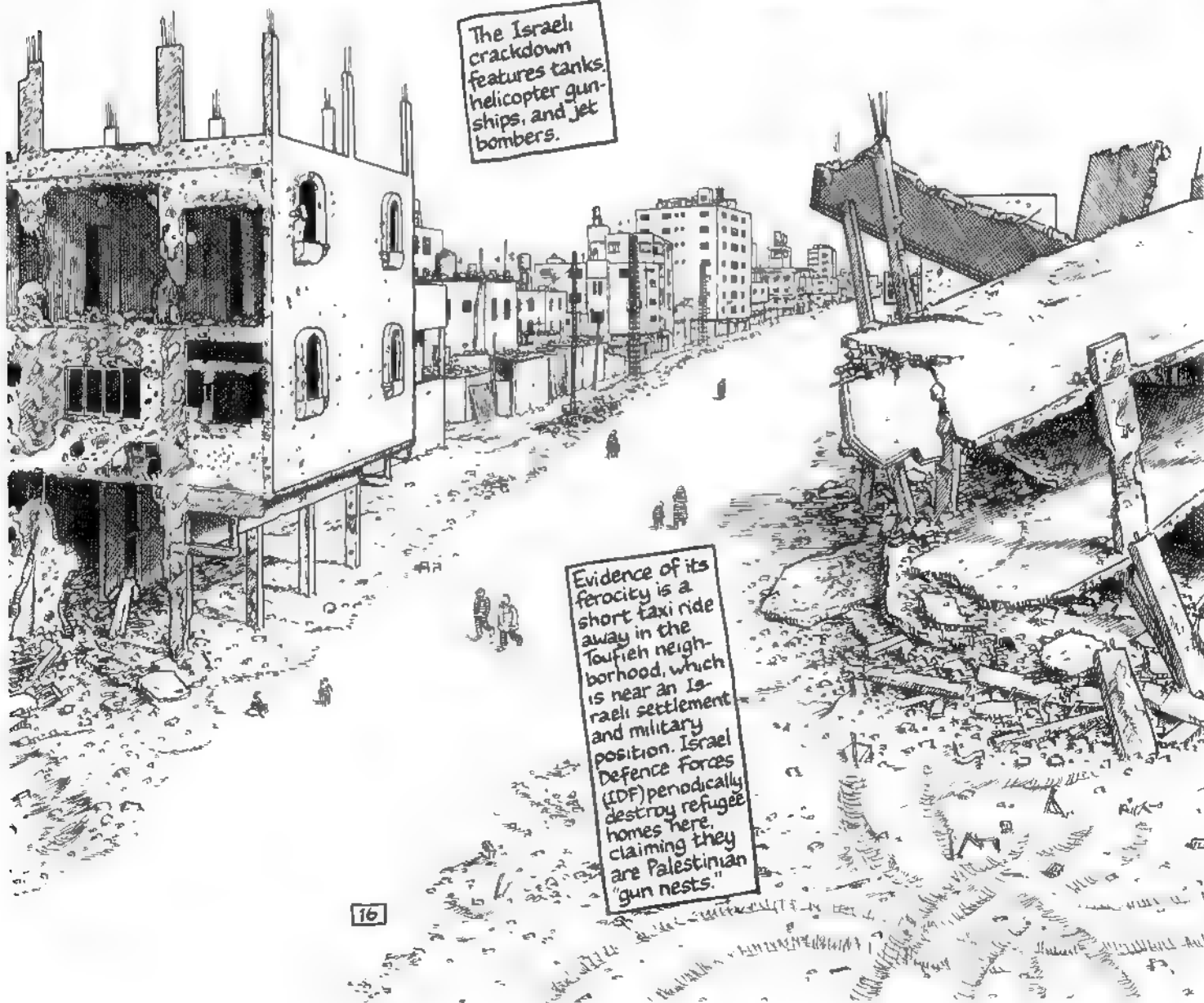


But now the revived stone throwing seems like a quaint echo of the earlier struggle —



the real resistance is in the hands of militant groups armed with infantry weapons and explosive belts

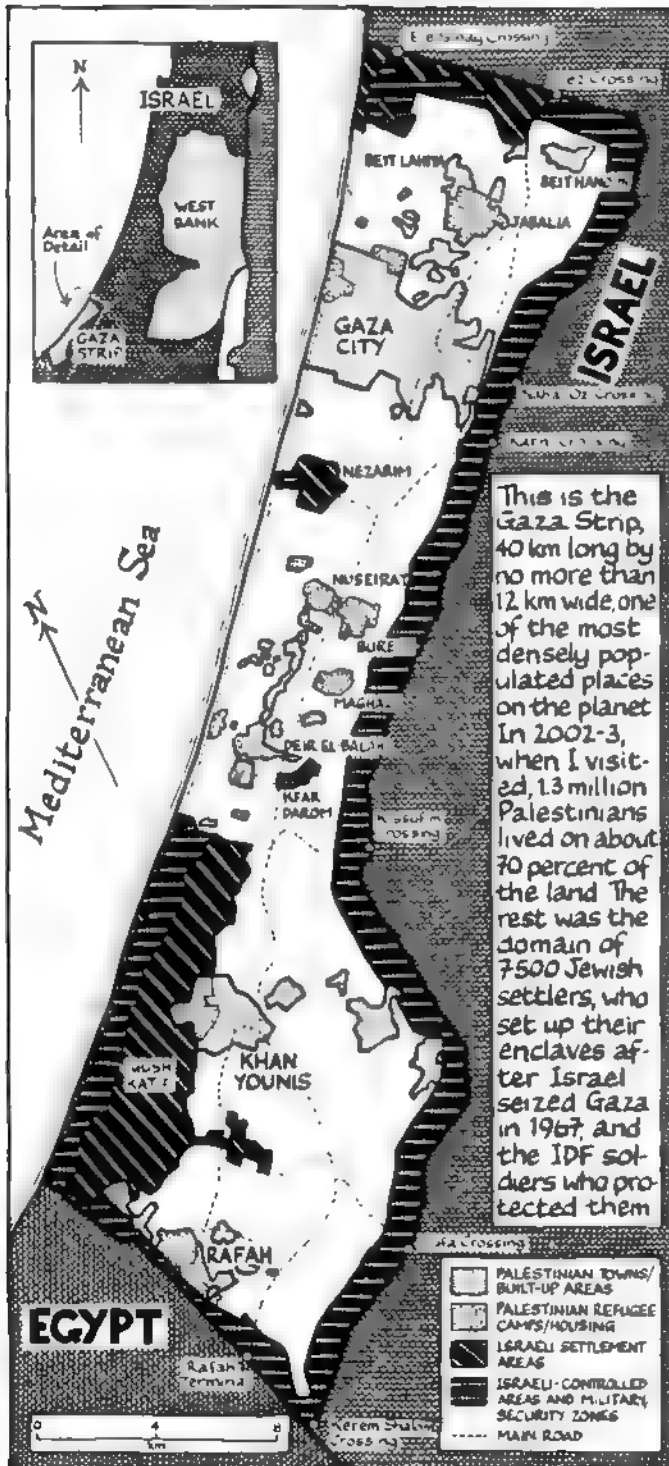
The Israeli crackdown features tanks, helicopter gunships, and jet bombers.



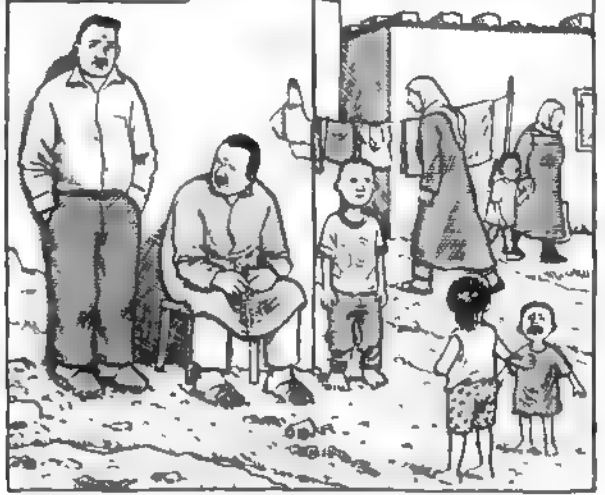
Evidence of its ferocity is a short taxi ride away in the Toufieh neighborhood, which is near an Israeli settlement and military position. Israel Defence Forces (IDF) periodically destroy refugee homes here, claiming they are Palestinian "gun nests."



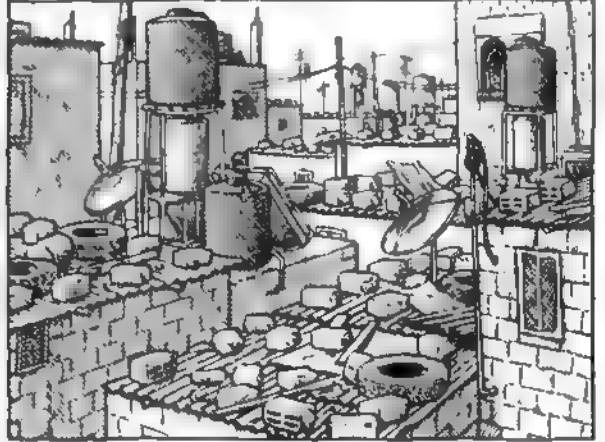
THE GAZA STRIP



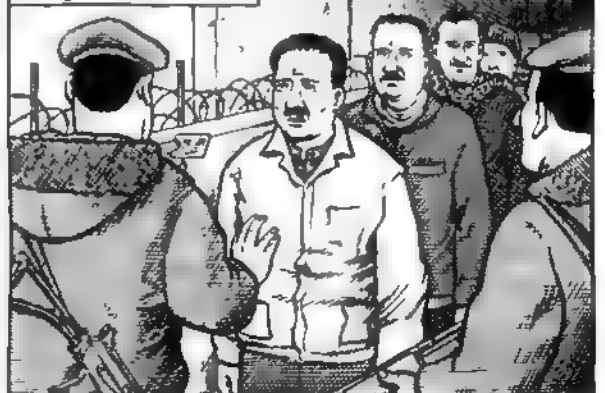
Among the Palestinians here, unemployment was at 50 percent. The number of people below the poverty level—living on less than \$2 per day—was at 70 percent.



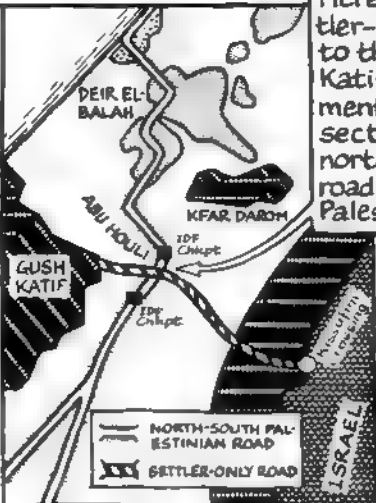
About two-thirds were registered refugees, the jetsam of the '48 war. Most of these lived in the eight major camps administered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency—UNRWA (pronounced as one word).



All access to and from Gaza, for Palestinians and foreigners, was controlled and heavily restricted by the Israelis.



The placement of settlements, settler roads, and check-points allowed the Israelis to easily separate one part of Gaza from another. For example, the south was frequently cut off from the rest of the Strip at the IDF check-points at Abu Houli.

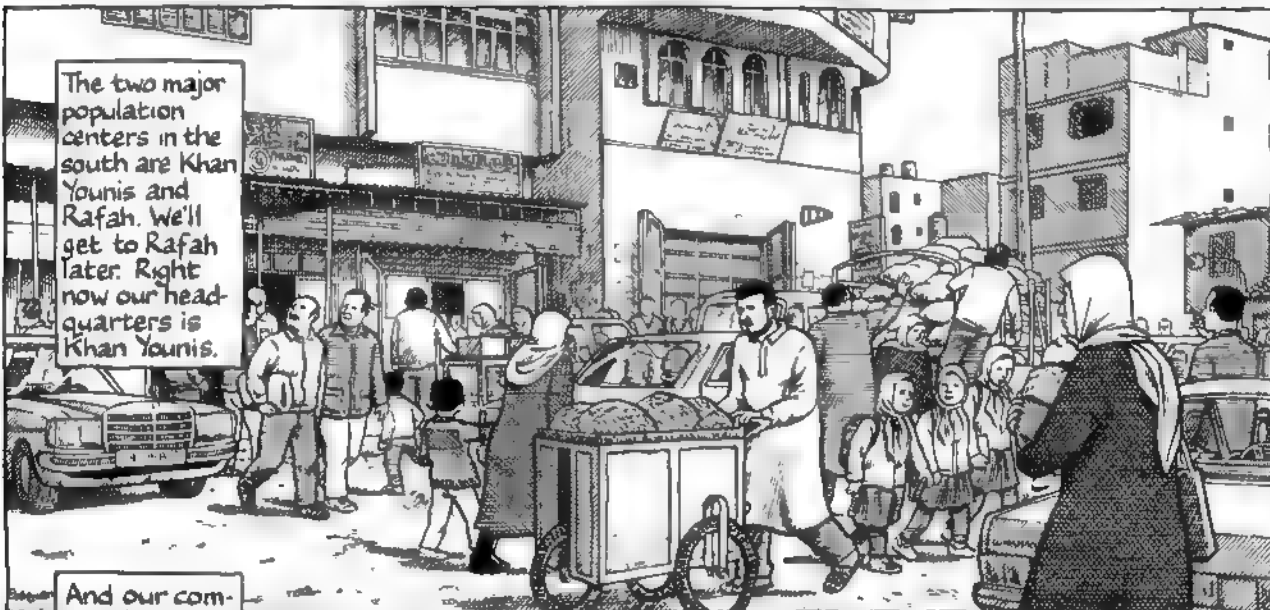


Here the settler-only road to the Gush Katif settlement bloc bisected the north-south road used by Palestinians.



When settler cars approached the overpass, or for "security" considerations, or for no discernible reason, Palestinian traffic was stopped here—for ten minutes, half a day, or days at a time.

The two major population centers in the south are Khan Younis and Rafah. We'll get to Rafah later. Right now our headquarters is Khan Younis.



And our command post is Abed's home in the center of town.



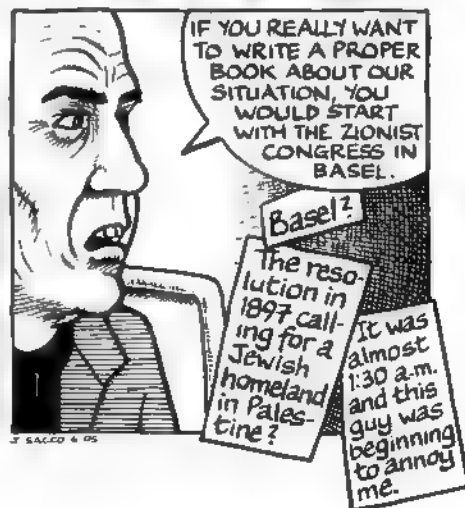
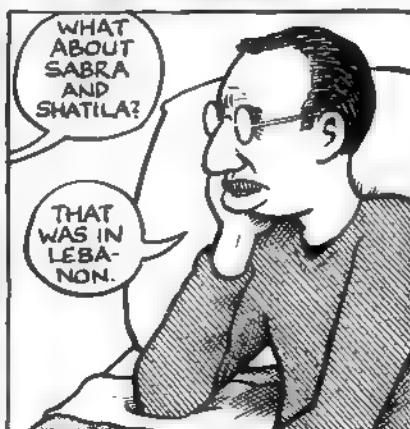
Here we plan the day's movements.

THE GUY WILL MEET US AFTER PRAYERS.

SOUNDS GOOD.

and here we eat and sleep

MUD, TENTS, BRICKS





WHAT ABOUT 1948?

Okay, okay! His point is finally taken..

and since one must start somewhere, that watershed year, when Israel declared independence and Arab armies attacked the nascent state, seems as logical a place as any.

When the shooting stopped and the UN had brokered an armistice demarcation line, the bruised Egyptian army held on to a tiny sliver of Palestine dubbed the Gaza Strip.



Of the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who fled the fighting or were expelled by Israeli forces, 200,000 ended up in Gaza, tripling its population.



The humanitarian crisis was enormous. Some refugees were housed in public buildings and mosques, but their number was simply too great.

Along the way, over the course of my visits to Gaza, Abed and I collect some stories about that time when the dispossessed came here with nothing and found — what?





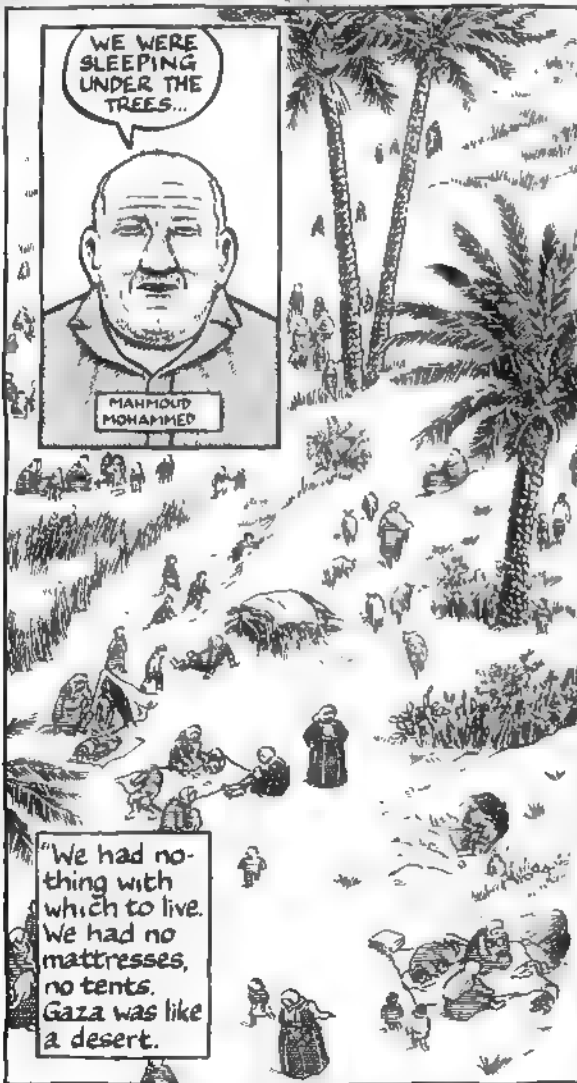
WHEN WE
CAME FROM
OUR ORIGINAL
VILLAGES.



MOHAMMED YOUSEF
SHAKER MOUSA

"We dug holes
and put blan-
kets on the
ground, and
we lived like
that for a
short time.

Some of the
people were
under tree
branches.
They covered
the branches
with blankets
and sheltered
themselves."



WE WERE
SLEEPING
UNDER THE
TREES...



MAHMOUD
MOHAMMED

"We had no-
thing with
which to live.
We had no
mattresses,
no tents.
Gaza was like
a desert.

"Then the Quakers came, and they put up huge tents."

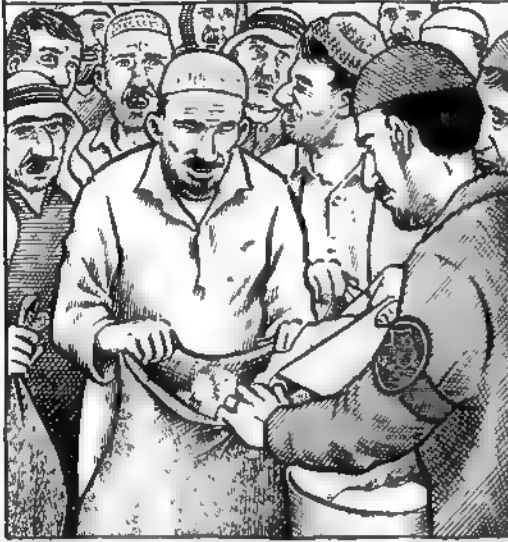


MOHAMMED YOUSEF
SHAKER MOUSA

"Some people were given a whole tent, a big tent. These big tents could be divided for four families. They divided each room from the others with a blanket.



"Then they distributed food Flour, oil..."



WE
WOULD
GO WITH MY
FATHER TO DIG
IN THE GROUND
FOR SOME METAL,
SOME OTHER
MATERIAL,
TO SELL.



"And we used to go to the Egyptian positions which were here to buy [the soldiers'] stale bread."



MAHMOUD MOHAMMED: "We cooked our food by burning cactus that we'd dried in the sun."



MOHAMMED YOUSEF SHAKER MOUSA: "They used to cut wood, and God would have to make it burn because the wood wasn't dry."



"No kerosene, no gas. Nothing."

MAHMOUD MOHAMMED: "We dug holes in the ground [for toilets] outside... People could do nothing more than this."



WATER?
THERE
WASN'T ANY
WATER



"We used to walk two kilometers to bring one jug of water... I used to carry my baby and at the same time put the jug on my head."



MAHMOUD MOHAMMED. "We used to bring the water from a far distance. When we came home, we'd find the water was gone. We'd drunk the water on the way."



RA'ESA SALIH HASSAN KALOUB. "Once when I was a child there was a donkey walking the streets, and I jumped on the donkey. I found the donkey full of fleas."



"And my mother took off all my clothes and burned them. There was a shortage of water, a shortage of soap"

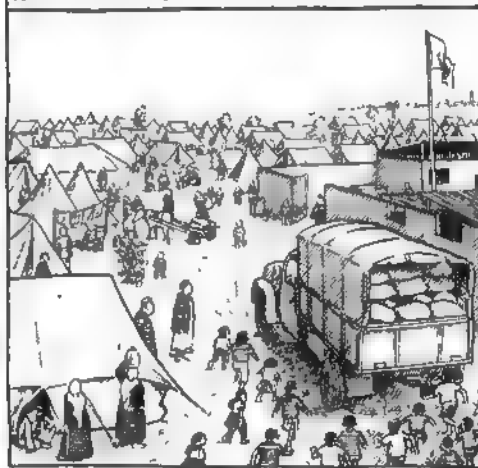
WE USED TO WASH IN THE TENTS

MARIAM EL-NAJEELI

THE TENT WAS THE KITCHEN AND THE TOILET AND THE BATHROOM AND THE LIVING ROOM AND THE SITTING ROOM.



UNRWA was established in late 1949 to provide for the Palestinian refugees, and it took over from the Quakers in 1950.



IN EACH NEIGHBORHOOD UNRWA BUILT FOUR OR FIVE TAPS IN ONE PLACE

SO THEY MADE A NETWORK OF WATER PIPES.

MOHAMMED ATWA EL-NAJEELI



MOHAMMED YOUSUF SHAKER MOUSA. "They built groups of toilets. A door for the women, and on the other side a door for the men. Anyone entering these toilets should wear high shoes otherwise he'd sink in the water and sewage."



YOUSSEF ISMAEL FOUDA. "We started to build clay houses ourselves because the tents didn't protect us from the rains... Small rooms, 3.5 x 3.5 meters."



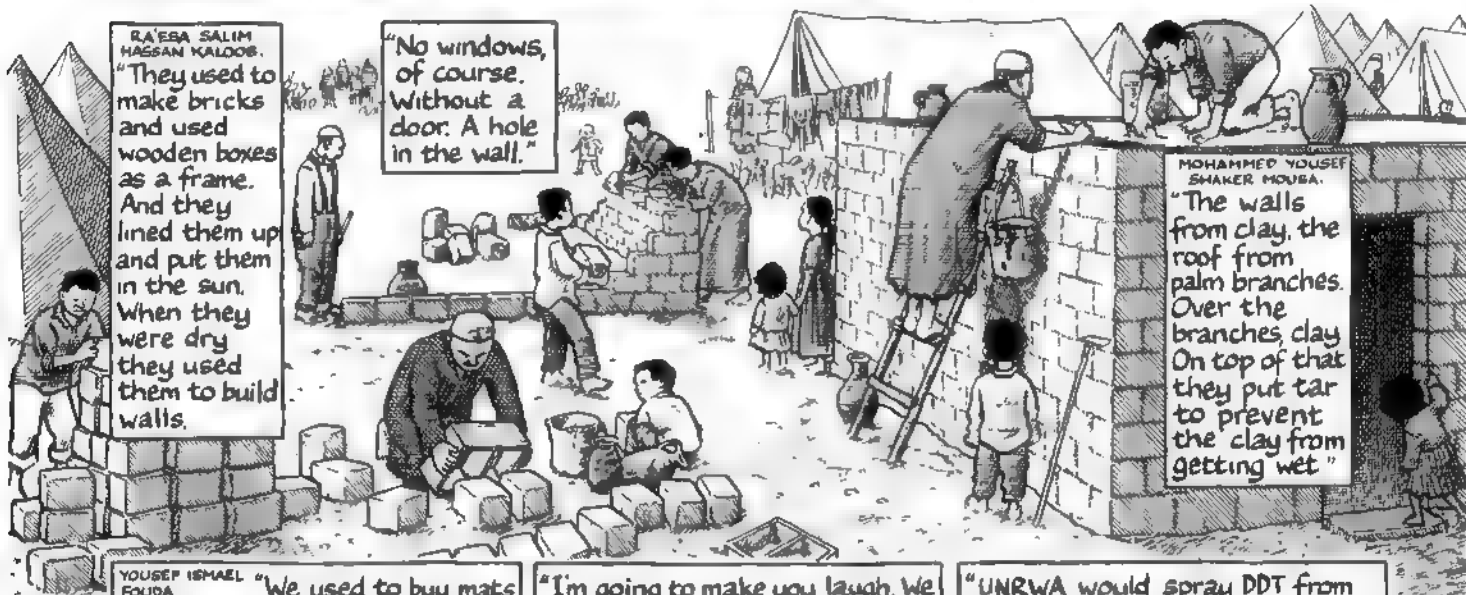
"Fifteen people in this room"



RA'ESA SALIM HASSAN KALOOS.

"They used to make bricks and used wooden boxes as a frame. And they lined them up and put them in the sun. When they were dry they used them to build walls."

"No windows, of course. Without a door. A hole in the wall."



MOHAMMED YOUSSEF SHAKER MOUSA.

"The walls from clay, the roof from palm branches. Over the branches, clay. On top of that they put tar to prevent the clay from getting wet."

YOUSSEF ISMAEL FOUDA

"We used to buy mats from Egypt that were full of bugs."



"I'm going to make you laugh. We would use a bit of moist flour to kill the bugs. You'd find bits of flour full of blood."



"UNRWA would spray DDT from time to time"



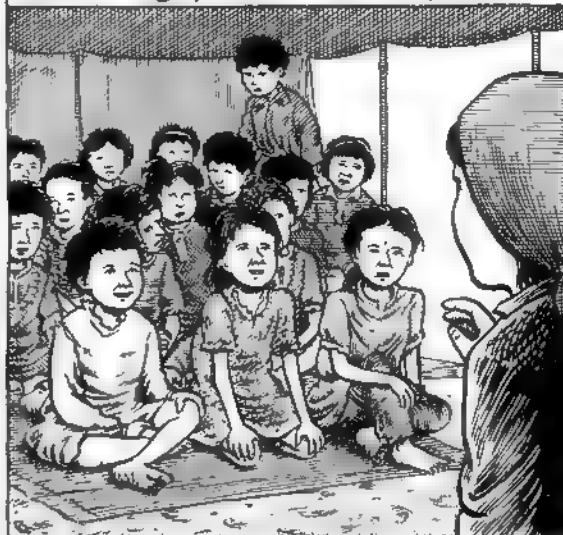
IT WAS A FANTASTIC DREAM FOR ME WHEN I SAW PICTURES IN THE NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES — I WAS JEALOUS WHEN I SAW A CHILD WITH LONG HAIR BECAUSE I COULDN'T LET MY HAIR GROW BECAUSE OF THE INSECTS AND DISEASES.



FUAD FAQAWI



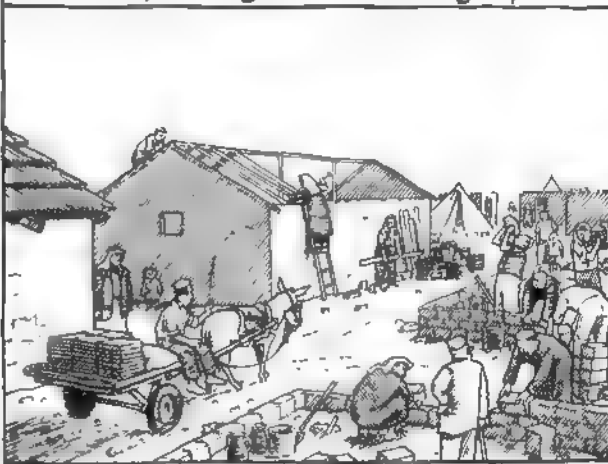
FATIMA EL-KHATEEB "They opened tent schools for us"



RA'ESA SALIM HASSAN KALOOS: "[I spent] not one day in school. I used to wear my hair back and run like a horse. And run, run!"



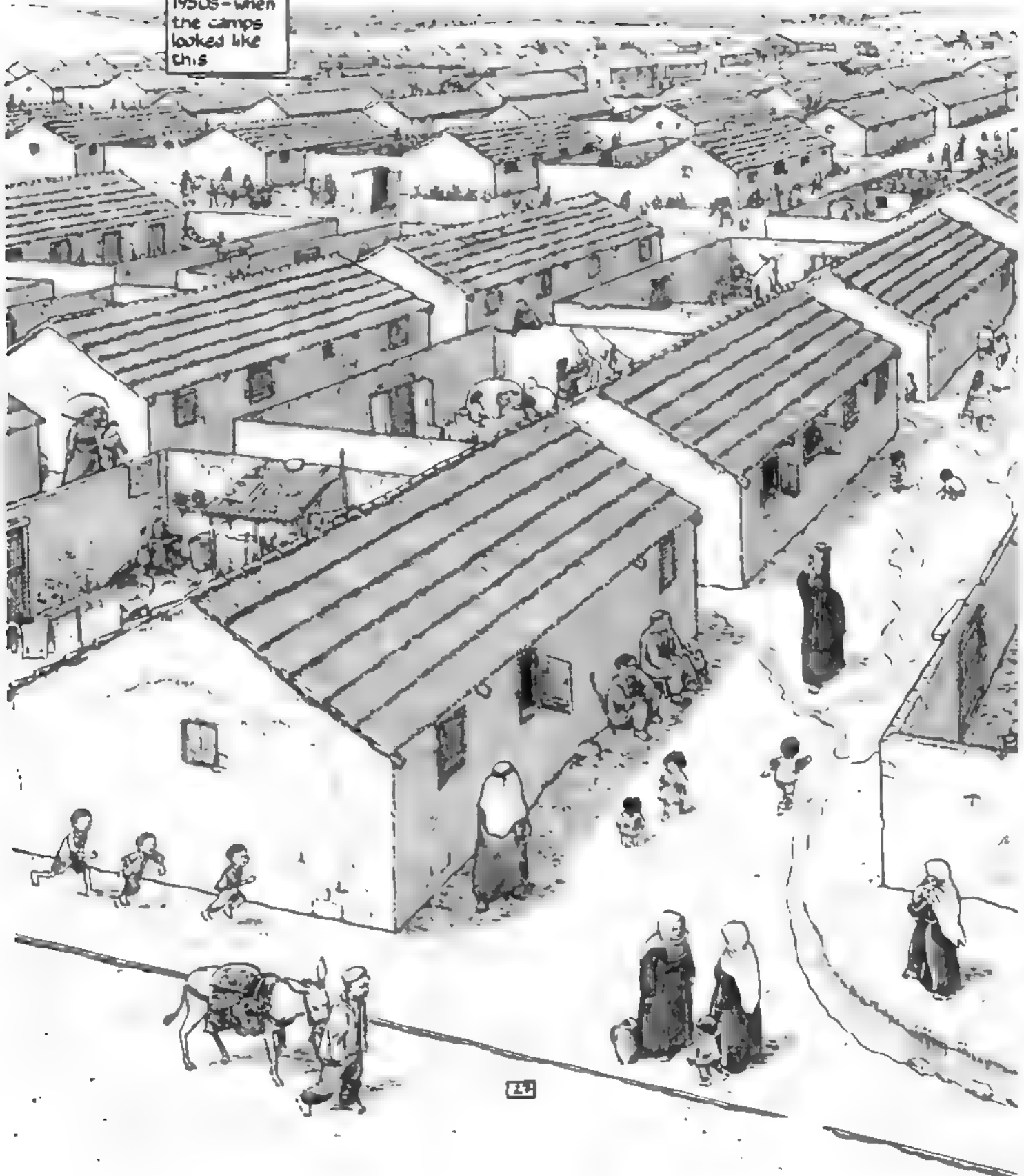
MOHAMMED YOUSSEF GHAKER MOUSA: "After a long period they demolished those [clay] houses periodically, and they brought brick blocks, and they built houses in groups."

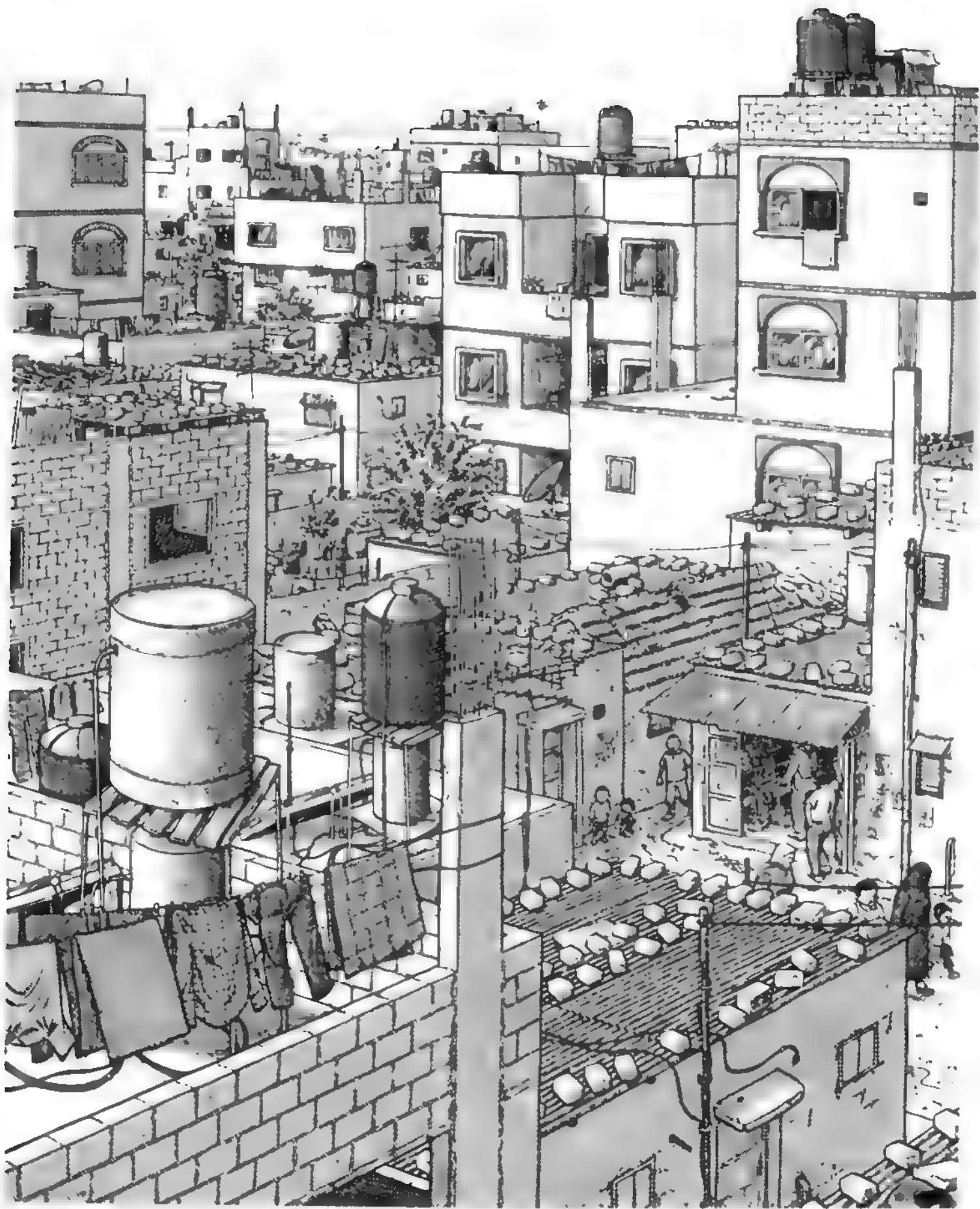


"They gave out rooms according to the number of family members... Each room was 2.5 meters square... Each [extended] family was surrounded by a wall."

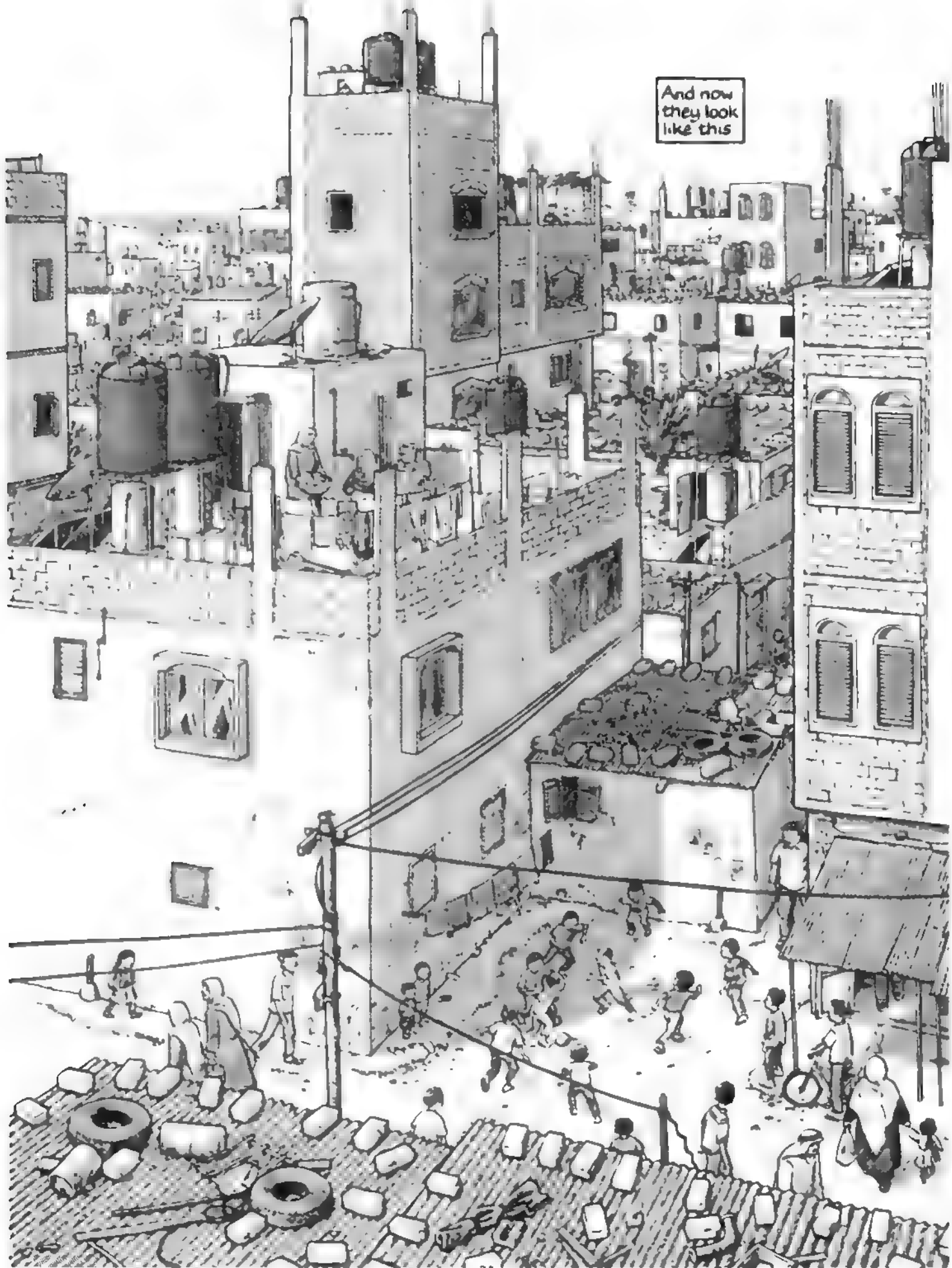


And so we
have taken
ourselves from
1948 to the
middle of the
1950s—when
the camps
looked like
this





And now
they look
like this



THE ONLY OPTION

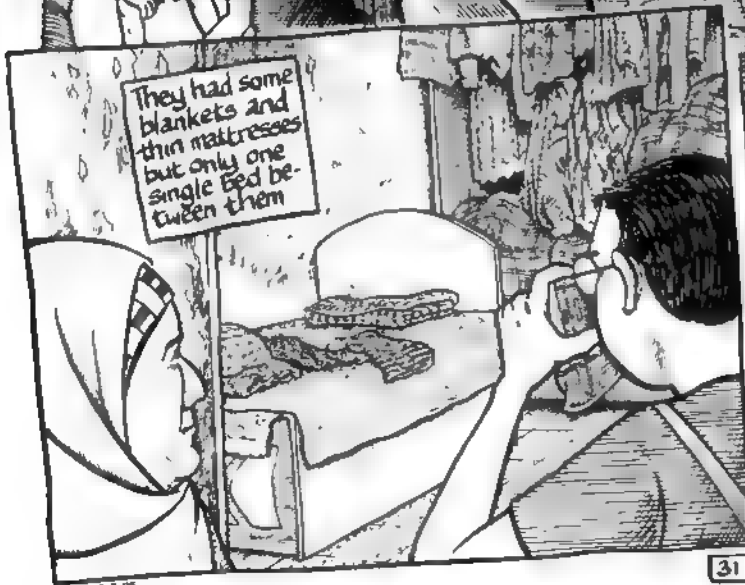
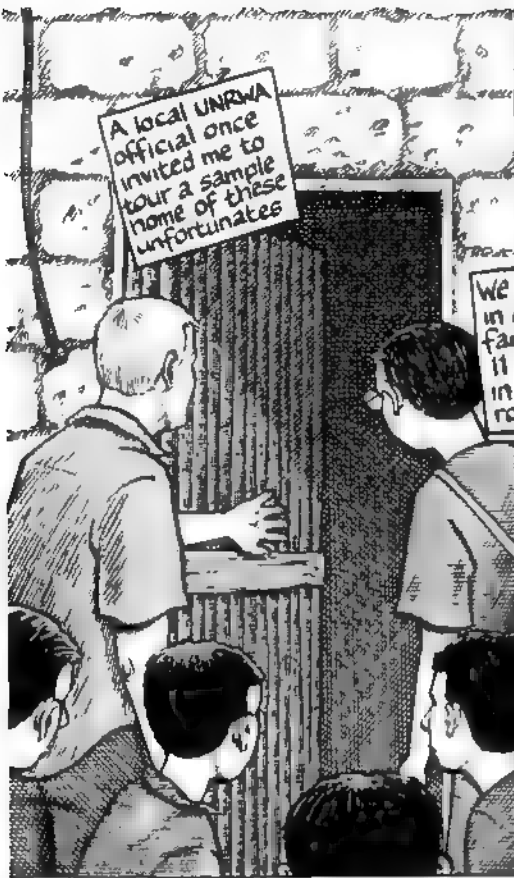
Since the mid-1950s the swollen population of Khan Younis camp has had nowhere to build but into the streets and up.

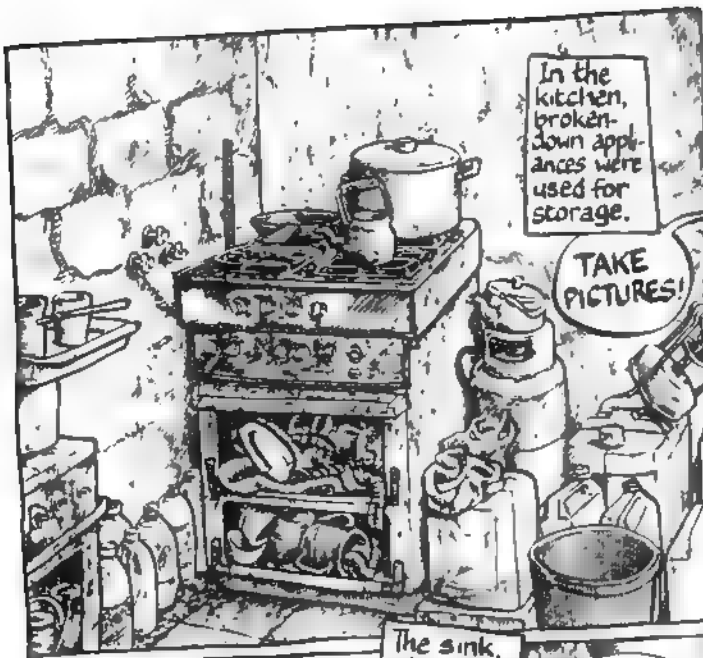
The camp is bordered by the town of the same name. From the late 1960s to 2005, it was hemmed in on its other sides by Gush Katif, the Jewish settlement bloc.

Palestinian camps all over the Gaza Strip have taken on a look of densely packed permanence, at some places indistinguishable from the towns they abut, with schools, workshops, mosques, and marketplaces...

and at other points the still-common asbestos roofs and the squalor beneath many of them remind a visitor he is among the grandchildren and great grandchildren of refugees who arrived with nothing and for whom nothing fundamental has changed

The poorest of the poor are designated hardship cases by UNRWA - there are almost 13,000 of them in Khan Younis alone.





In the kitchen, broken-down appliances were used for storage.

TAKE PICTURES!



Back where the girl had been sitting, only a blanket separated the toilet and the most private of human functions from the rest of the room.



The sink, also used for bathing, drained into a bucket.

TAKE! TAKE!



I had to get out of there, to swim up to the surface and gasp for air.

and the girl undoubtedly wanted to return to her studies...

but the mother was holding us back...

explaining that her husband was clinically depressed.

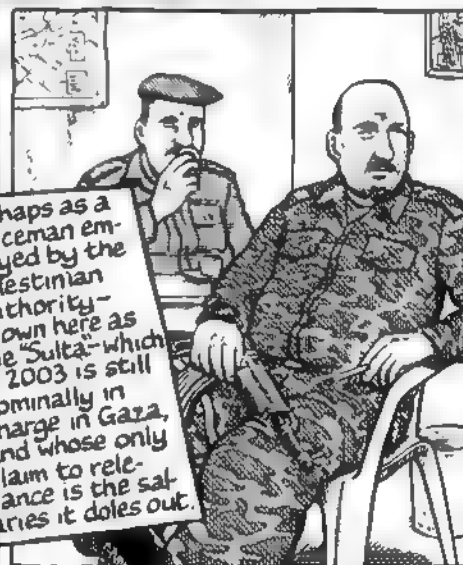
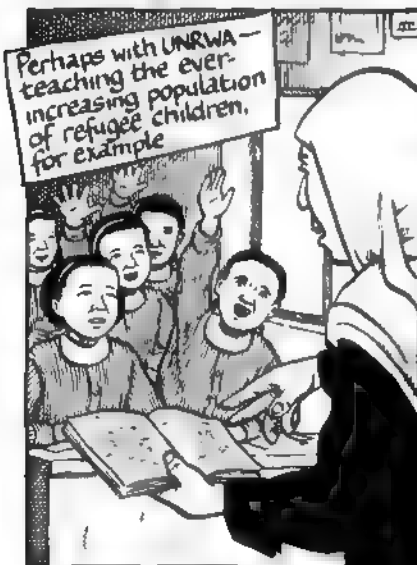
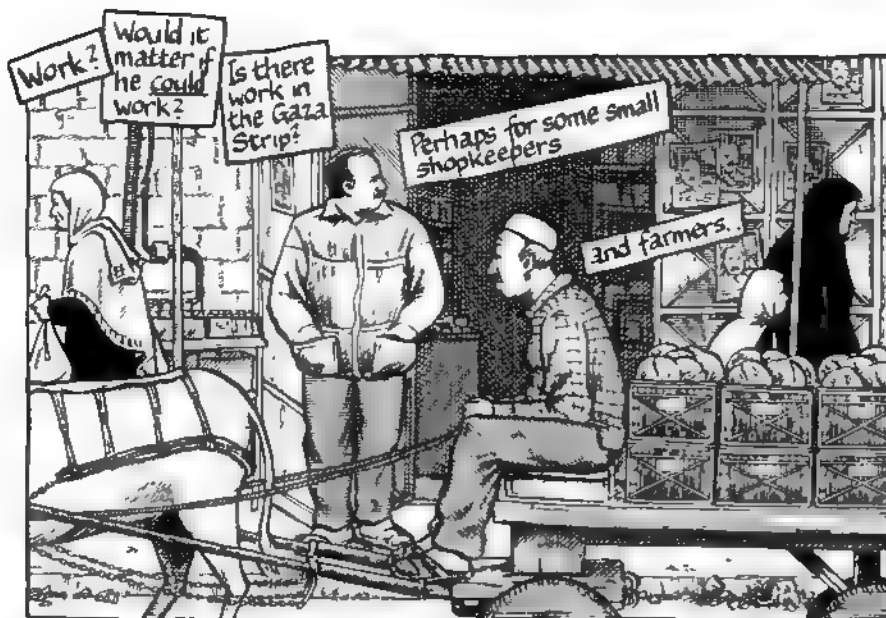


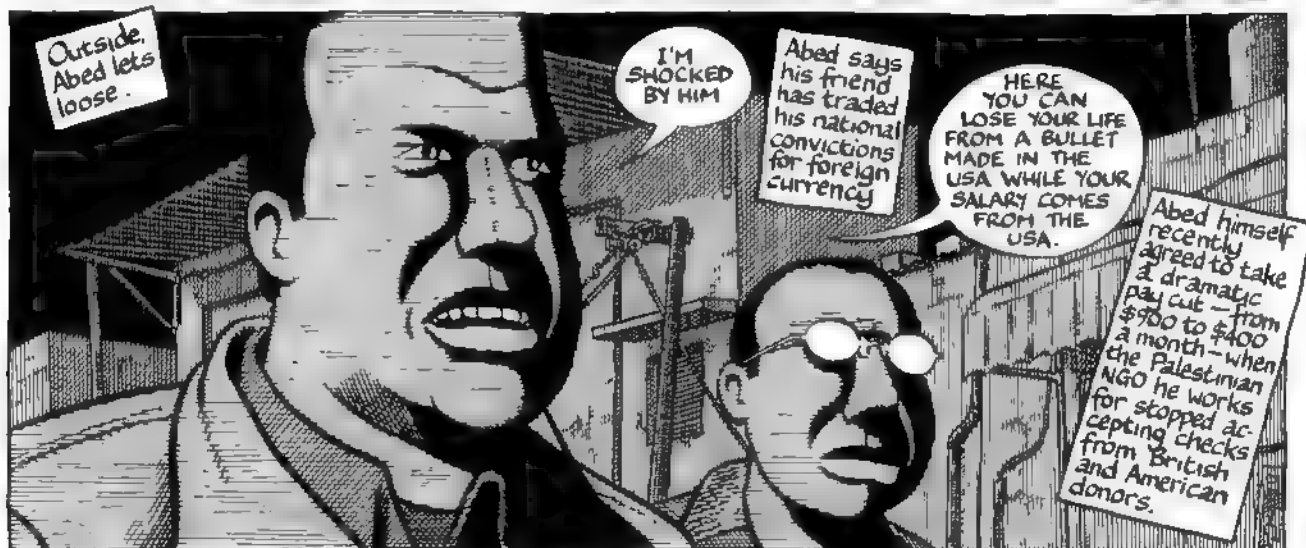
telling us about his pills



his pills!

how he couldn't get work because of his condition





Most Gazans don't have the luxury of such assessments. Many covet menial or physically demanding low-wage jobs in Israel, which still pay twice as much as similar jobs in Gaza.



Half of Gaza's workforce once held jobs in Israel, but with the escalating violence Israel weaned itself off Palestinian labor and now imports Thais and Romanians and Chinese and others to do its hot, dusty work.

Mahmoud, Abed's brother-in-law, is one of the few Gazans still holding a permit to work in Israel.

He's just returned home from his job where he finishes wooden furniture.



Besides three Israelis, he works with four Romanians, two Ecuadorians, and a Russian.

SOME OF THEM SPEAK A LITTLE HEBREW, AND SOMETIMES WE USE HAND GESTURES



I HAVE NO PROBLEMS WITH THEM.

THEY ARE WORKERS LIKE ME

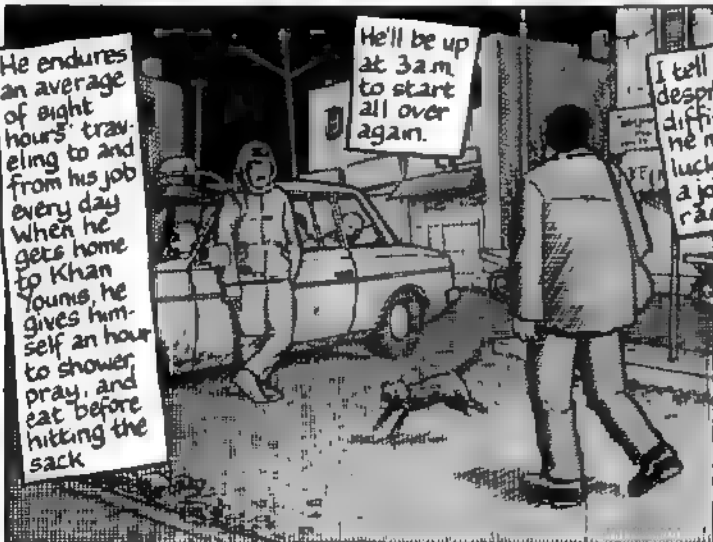
THEY HAVE THE SAME TARGET: TO WORK AND MAKE MONEY



He endures an average of eight hours' traveling to and from his job every day. When he gets home to Khan Younis, he gives himself an hour to shower, pray, and eat before hitting the sack.

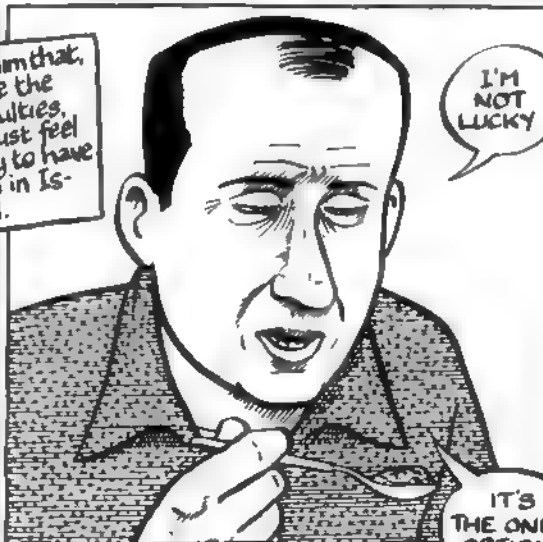
He'll be up at 3 a.m. to start all over again.

I tell him that, despite the difficulties, he must feel lucky to have a job in Israel.



I'M NOT LUCKY

IT'S THE ONLY OPTION*



Indeed, what are Mahmoud's other options? He has to provide for a wife and five children.

And what were the options of the Palestinian refugees who had lost their homes and land with Israel's birth and found themselves roaming the sands of Gaza?

SIDESHOW

Of them, an Israeli Foreign Ministry report in 1949 predicted that "the most adaptable and best survivors would manage by a process of natural selection, and the others will waste away. Some will die but most will turn into human debris and social outcasts and probably join the poorest classes in the Arab countries."



The refugees were landless, destitute, and hungry; they were dependent on meager handouts; the men were unemployed, idle.



Meanwhile, in the fields they had left behind, their crops ripened. In the larders of the homes they had fled there was oil and flour. All of it was a tantalizingly few hours' walk away.



All of it was now in the hands of a new people, the Israelis

In those days the Gaza Strip was not surrounded by an electrically charged fence like it is today. The armistice demarcation line was thinly guarded. The hungriest and the boldest refugees started to slip into what was now called Israel to harvest and scavenge and to bring back all they could carry.



In time, the poorly defended outposts Israel began putting up along the border with Gaza became tempting targets for refugees, who stole livestock and equipment from them.



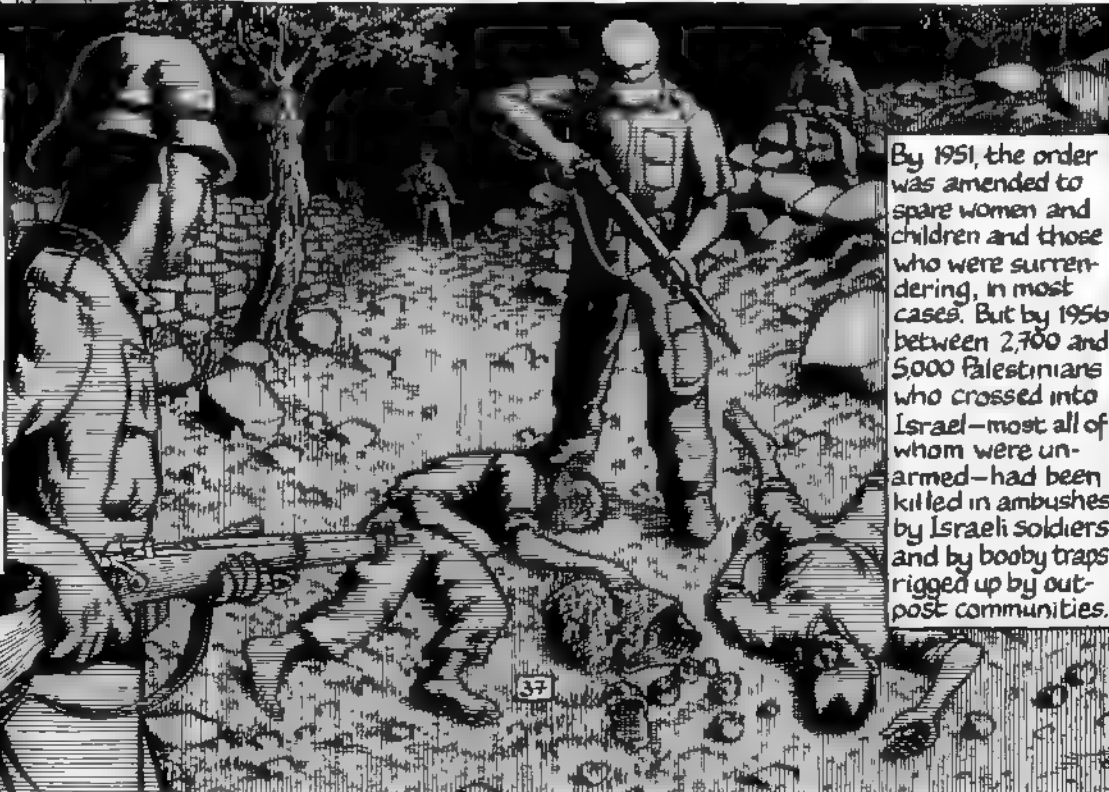
Refugees also entered Israel to visit family members who had not fled, to transit to the Jordanian-annexed West Bank, where there might be a chance of a better livelihood; or even to move back home.

Israel was absorbing hundreds of thousands of Jewish immigrants.



It would not countenance the return or trespass of Palestinian refugees.

To Israel, all refugees who crossed back into its territory were "infiltrators," and in an effort to stop them, army units patrolling the border were given shoot-to-kill orders. About 1,000 returning refugees were killed in 1949 alone.



By 1951, the order was amended to spare women and children and those who were surrendering, in most cases. But by 1956, between 2,700 and 5,000 Palestinians who crossed into Israel—most all of whom were unarmed—had been killed in ambushes by Israeli soldiers and by booby traps rigged up by outpost communities.

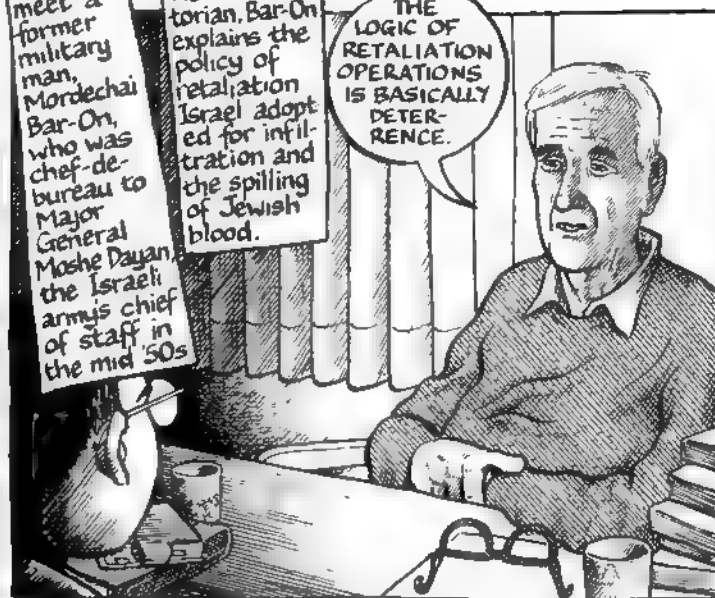
Israel's resolve to deal harshly with infiltrators hardened because they sometimes murdered Jews in chance encounters or killed them out of revenge. Almost 300 Israeli civilians had been killed by 1956.



In Jerusalem, I meet a former military man, Mordechai Bar-On, who was chief-de-bureau to Major General Moshe Dayan, the Israeli army's chief of staff in the mid '50s

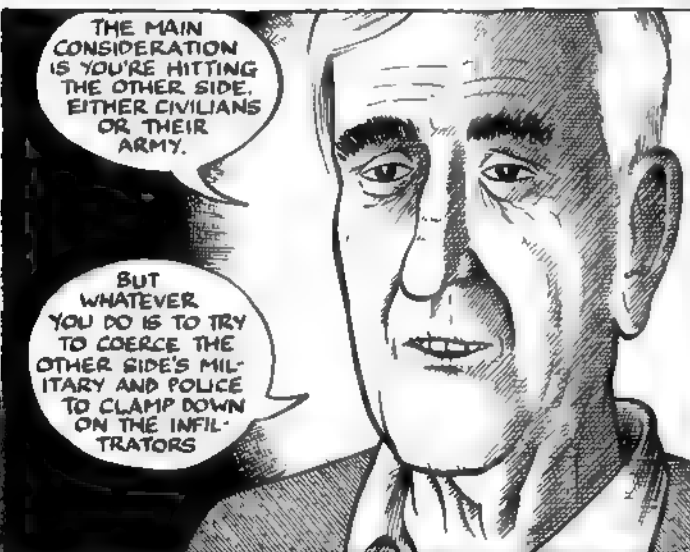
Now a historian, Bar-On explains the policy of retaliation Israel adopted for infiltration and the spilling of Jewish blood.

THE LOGIC OF RETALIATION OPERATIONS IS BASICALLY DETERRENCE.



THE MAIN CONSIDERATION IS YOU'RE HITTING THE OTHER SIDE, EITHER CIVILIANS OR THEIR ARMY.

BUT WHATEVER YOU DO IS TO TRY TO COERCE THE OTHER SIDE'S MILITARY AND POLICE TO CLAMP DOWN ON THE INFILTRATORS



Israel's initial policy was to strike hard at Palestinian civilians as a way of sending a signal to the Arabs to seal their side of the border



This approach reached its climax in 1953 in a raid in the West Bank led by Major Ariel Sharon in retaliation for the murder of a Jewish woman and two of her children.

Sharon's orders were to attack the village of Qibya and, specifically, to cause "maximal killing."



Encountering no resistance in the village itself, Sharon's men shot Palestinians hiding in their homes and then blew up the structures on top of them. Of at least 42 killed in Qibya, 38 were women and children.



The international outcry was such that the Israeli government decided henceforward to focus retaliatory strikes on military and police targets, not civilians.

But according to Bar-On, the raids on civilians—

—HAD NO EFFECT ON THE EGYPTIANS BECAUSE NASSER COULDN'T CARE LESS WHAT HAPPENED IN THE GAZA STRIP



President Jemal Abdel Nasser!

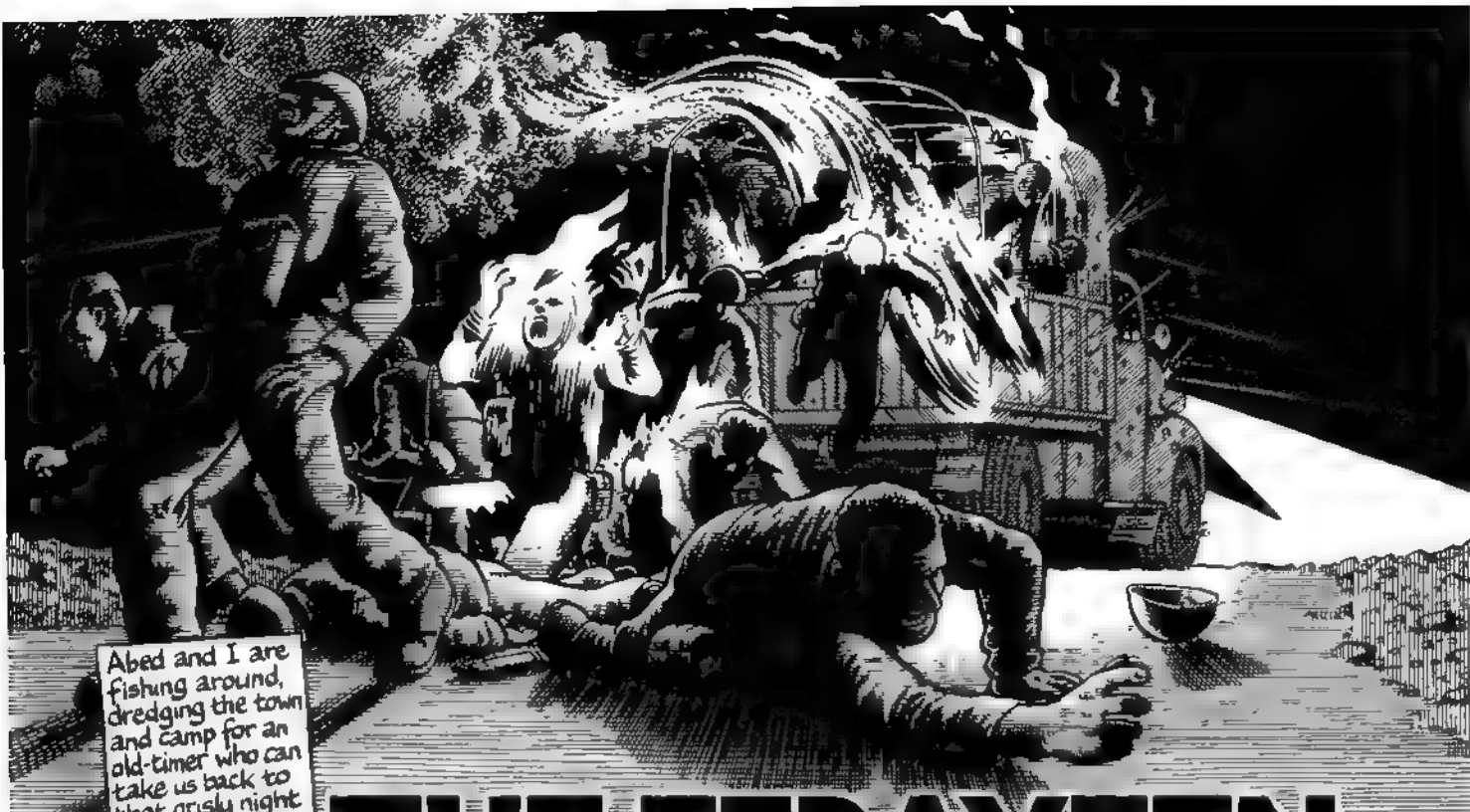
One of the greatest leaders of modern Arab history!

He had been among the military men who had overthrown Egypt's monarchy in 1952, and he was the chief proponent of pan-Arab nationalism—a single state that would include North Africa, Mesopotamia, and the Arabian Peninsula.

But if Nasser thought events in Gaza weren't really "anything that would endanger his own regime in Cairo," as Bar-On suggests, that was going to change on the night of February 28, 1955.



Which brings us to our first footnote



Abed and I are fishing around, dredging the town and camp for an old-timer who can take us back to that grisly night in February 1955 and into the boots of the Palestinian guerrilla group that it spawned

THE FEDAYEEN



We jump into taxis to follow tantalizing leads!

To the hospital!

Someone has told us that the brother of a man working there was—

Yes! Yes! His brother was a guerrilla, a fedayee, all right, but—

HE DIED 35 YEARS AGO.



We're nothing if not persistent.



We have another name and we're in another taxi, this time heading out of town, into the countryside.

And we're in another home, in another room, crossing our fingers, hoping, "inshallah"—God willing—that we're about to meet The Real Thing—



SALAAM ALEIKUM



ALEIKUM ES-SALAAM

- and one look tells us we have our man.



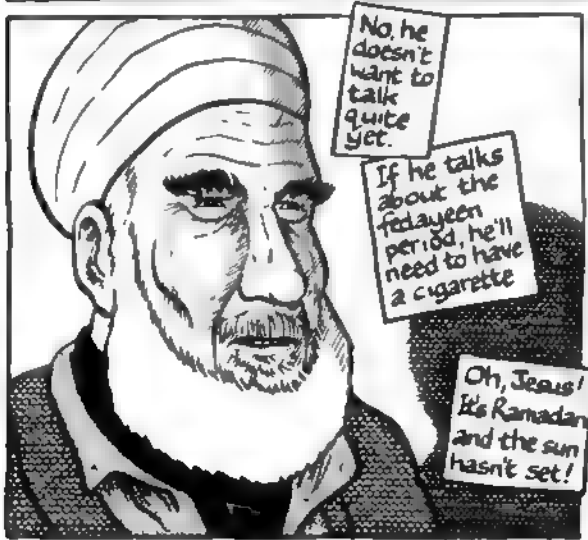
We have our man and I have my tape recorder..

and before the last salutation of the obligatory pleasantries has been vollied and returned. I've lobbed my first question into the air.

SO...

WE UNDERSTAND YOU WERE WITH THE FEDAYEEN

CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THAT EXPERIENCE?



No, he doesn't want to talk quite yet.

If he talks about the fedayeen period, he'll need to have a cigarette

Oh, Jesus! It's Ramadan and the sun hasn't set!

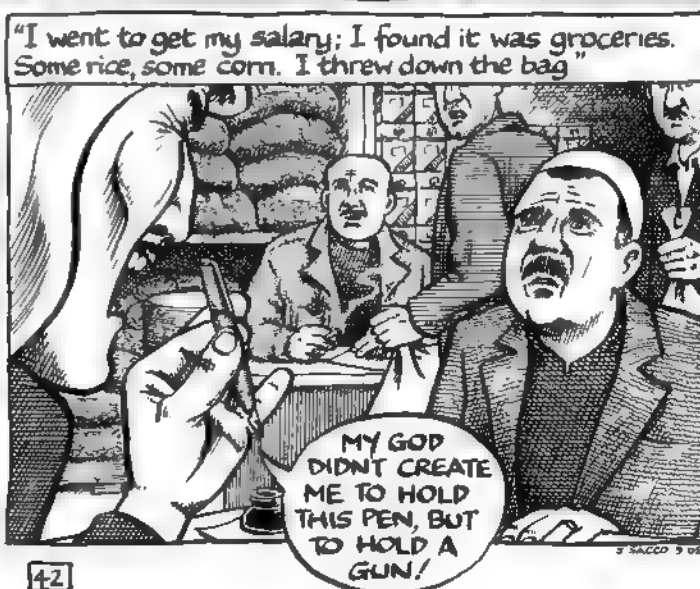
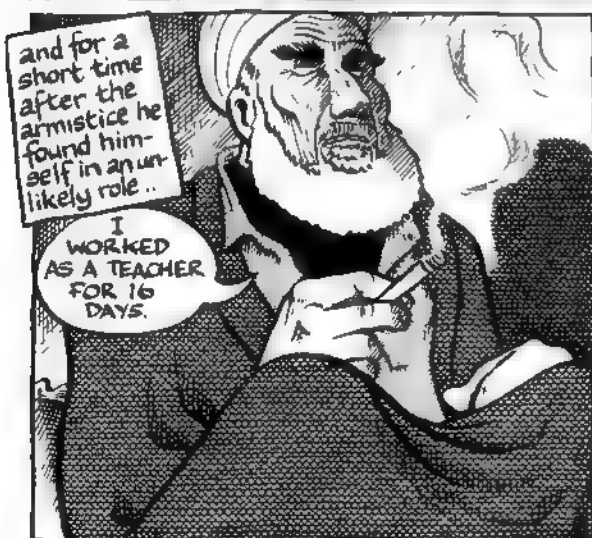
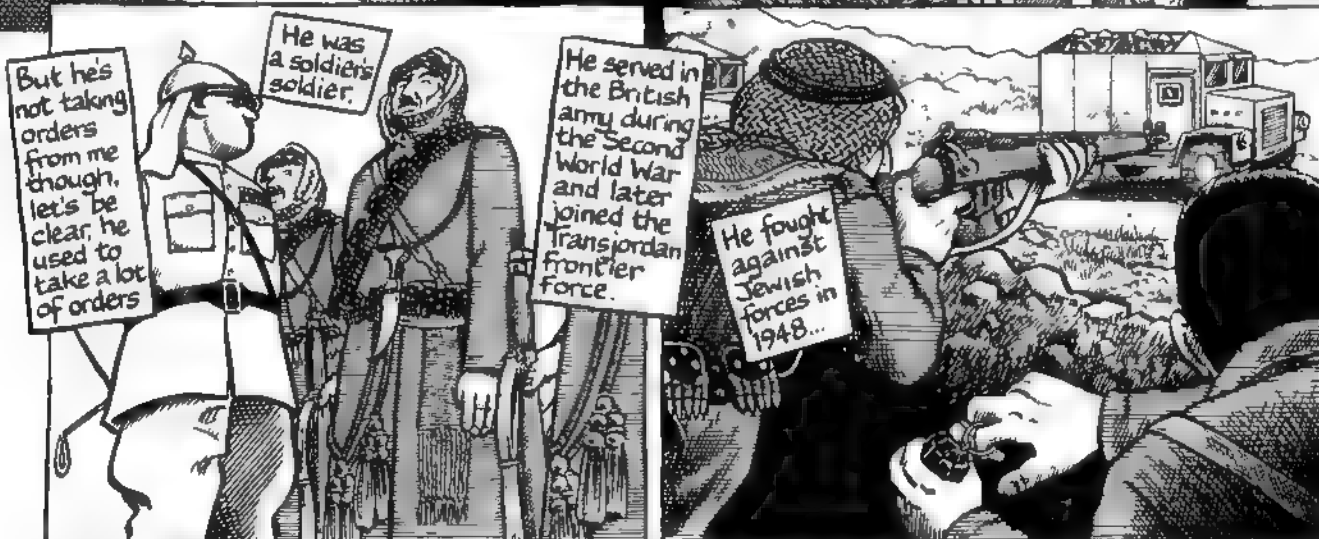


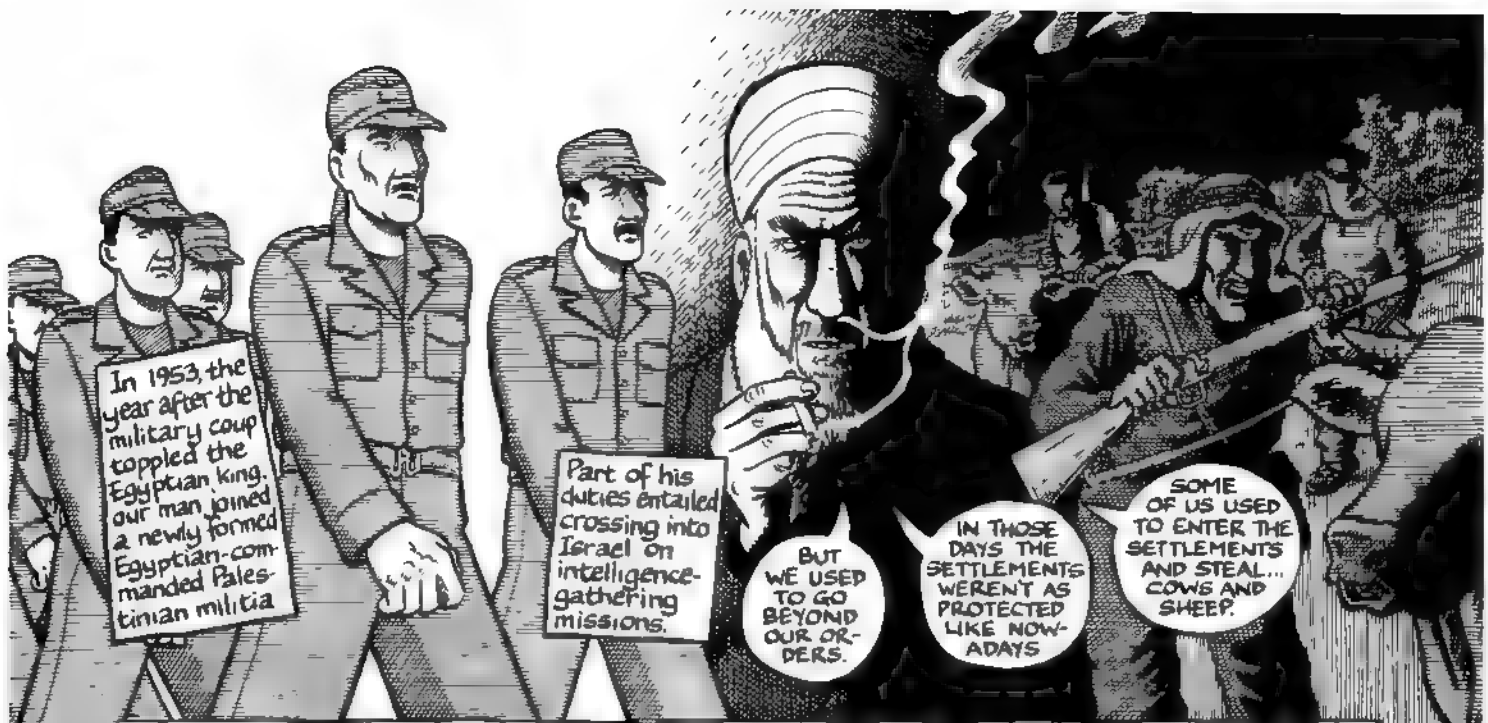
HE IS ASKING US TO RETURN IN THE EVENING, AFTER THE FAST

SO HE CAN SMOKE?

SO HE CAN SMOKE

And thus begins the aggravating mismatch pitting hapless cartoonist against wily ex-guerrilla





In 1953, the year after the military coup toppled the Egyptian king, our man joined a newly formed Egyptian-commanded Palestinian militia

Part of his duties entailed crossing into Israel on intelligence-gathering missions.

BUT WE USED TO GO BEYOND OUR ORDERS.

IN THOSE DAYS THE SETTLEMENTS WERENT AS PROTECTED LIKE NOW-ADAYS

SOME OF US USED TO ENTER THE SETTLEMENTS AND STEAL... COWS AND SHEEP.

At one point scores of Palestinian militiamen were temporarily cashiered for their ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, a militant Islamic group hostile to Cairo and responsible for its own freelance missions of sabotage and revenge in Israel.

AND YOU WERE ONE OF THOSE DISMISSED?

THE FIRST ONE!



YOU, COME HERE!

YOU ARE THE FIRST ONE!

YES, I SWEAR!

But after four months he was called back to service, he says

His new Palestinian unit began to take over border-guard duties from regular Egyptian soldiers, for whom he had nothing but contempt.

"They were in a room

"It wasn't a proper military position

"At night they brought hashish and smoked it through the hubbly-bubbly.

"And they brought alcohol and drank it.

"And slept.

"Anytime the Israelis wanted to kill them, they could have killed them.



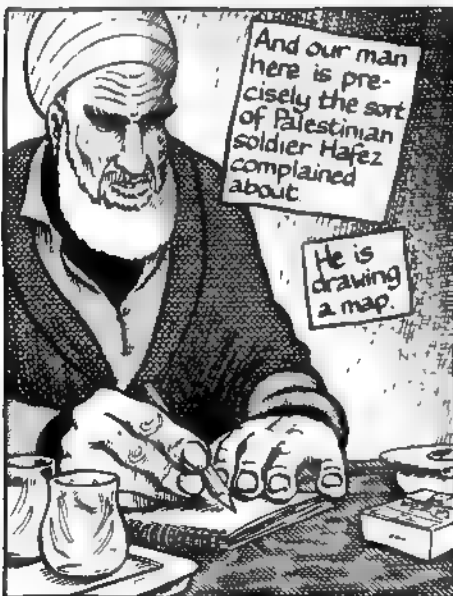
The Egyptian authorities implemented stiff jail sentences for those caught doing so. Crackdowns often would intensify after Israeli retaliatory strikes on Egyptian positions in Gaza that usually followed the murder of Jews by Palestinian raiders.



But how far could the Palestinian border guards be trusted to prevent their refugee kin from entering what had until recently been their land?



Not at all, according to Major Mustafa Hafez, head of Egypt's military intelligence in Gaza, who claimed that "Palestinian troops encourage the movement of infiltrators and carry out attacks along the line, and this will lead to an increase in tension."





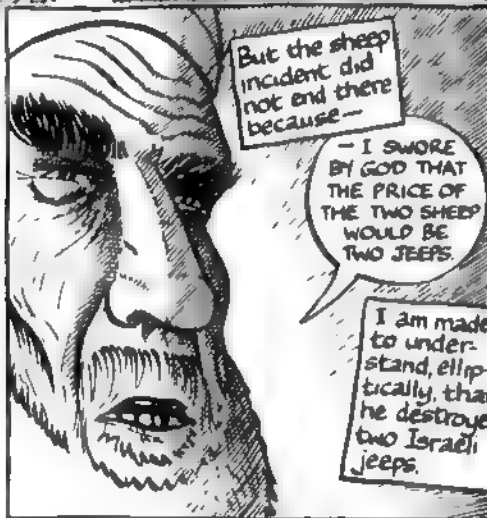
WHEN WE NOTICED A JEEP COMING, WE TOLD THEM TO BRING THE SHEEP BACK INSIDE

A firefight ensued with the Israeli patrol, and two sheep were killed

The Egyptian military was not pleased by this unnecessary provocation of the Israelis, and—

—THEIR JUDGMENT WAS THAT I PAY THE PRICE OF THE BULLETS FIRED (IN FACT THE OWNERS OF THE SHEEP PAID ME BACK)

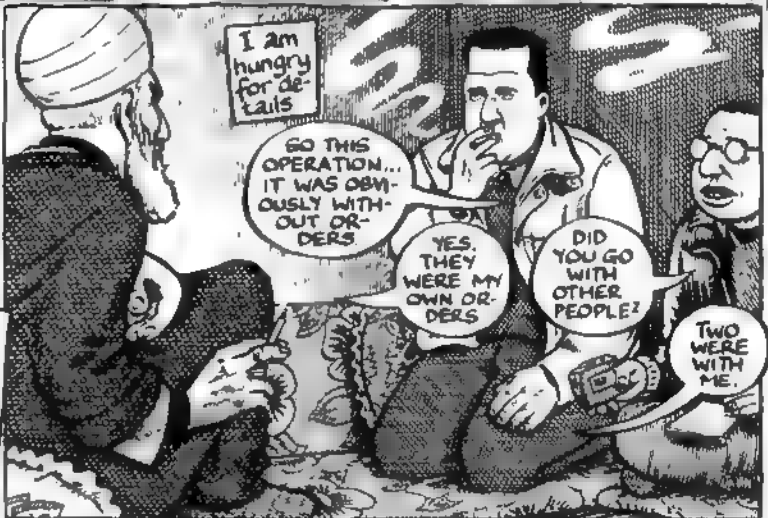
AND I WAS SUPPOSED TO BE PROMOTED TO SERGEANT, BUT THEY STOPPED THE PROMOTION



But the sheep incident did not end there because—

— I SWORE BY GOD THAT THE PRICE OF THE TWO SHEEP WOULD BE TWO JEEPS.

I am made to understand, elliptically, that he destroyed two Israeli jeeps.



I am hungry for details

GO THIS OPERATION... IT WAS OBVIOUSLY WITHOUT ORDERS

YES, THEY WERE MY OWN ORDERS

DID YOU GO WITH OTHER PEOPLE?

TWO WERE WITH ME.

But he won't tell me about the actions inside Israel that took care of the jeeps except to say he got caught red-handed by UNTSO, the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, which was charged with the unenviable task of monitoring and if possible preventing cease-fire violations.



"It was our bad luck in the incident over the second jeep... that there was a battle, and the international supervisor came immediately and photographed us. I was carrying a [captured] machine gun."

UNTSO presented the photographic proof that Palestinian troops, supposedly under Egyptian control, were crossing the very border they had been ordered to secure.



"It was impossible to deny this picture."

"This picture was very clear"

The Egyptians sentenced him to a prison term in Khan Younis.

And while our protagonist cooled his heels behind bars, the history from which our footnotes dangle was proceeding apace.

In Israel, former Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion came out of retirement and took over the job of defense minister. Together with army Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan he advocated a hard-line position against the Arabs



When an Israeli bicyclist was killed by Palestinian infiltrators on February 25, 1955, Ben-Gurion and Dayan were able to convince the less hawkish prime minister, Moshe Sharett, to authorize an attack on Egyptian military positions near Gaza City.



Ironically, in the few months spanning late 1954 and early 1955 the Egyptians had largely succeeded in stopping Palestinian refugees from entering Israel and had halted their own cross-border missions.



Lt. General ELM Burns, the Canadian head of UNTSO, called it 'one of the most quiet periods on record'

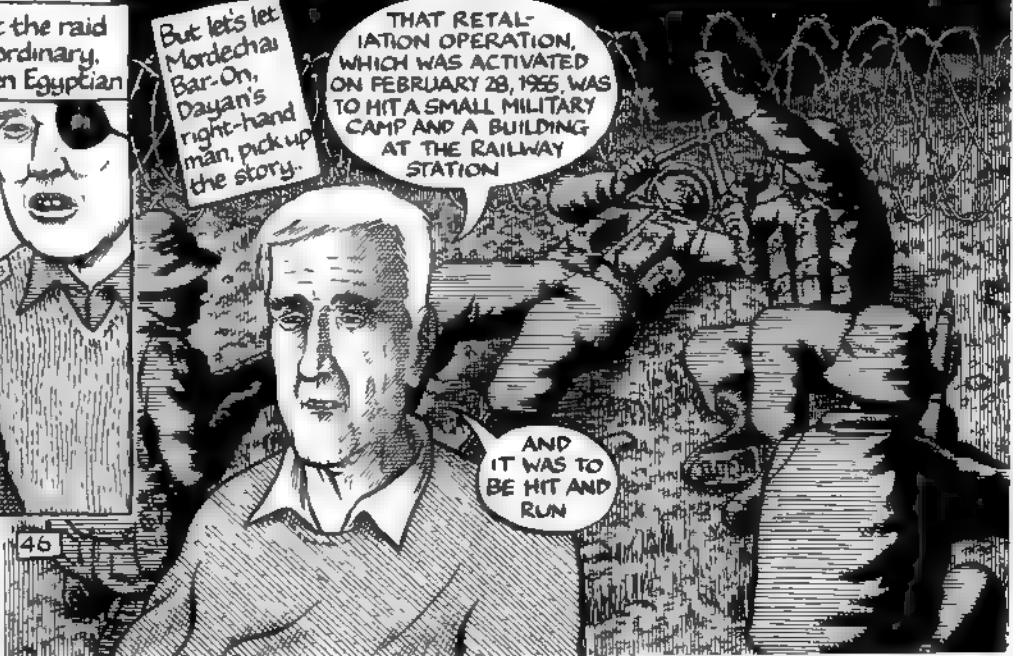
Dayan promised Sharett that the raid would be nothing out of the ordinary, that it would cause perhaps ten Egyptian casualties



But let's let Mordechai Bar-On, Dayan's right-hand man, pick up the story.

THAT RETALIATION OPERATION, WHICH WAS ACTIVATED ON FEBRUARY 28, 1955, WAS TO HIT A SMALL MILITARY CAMP AND A BUILDING AT THE RAILWAY STATION

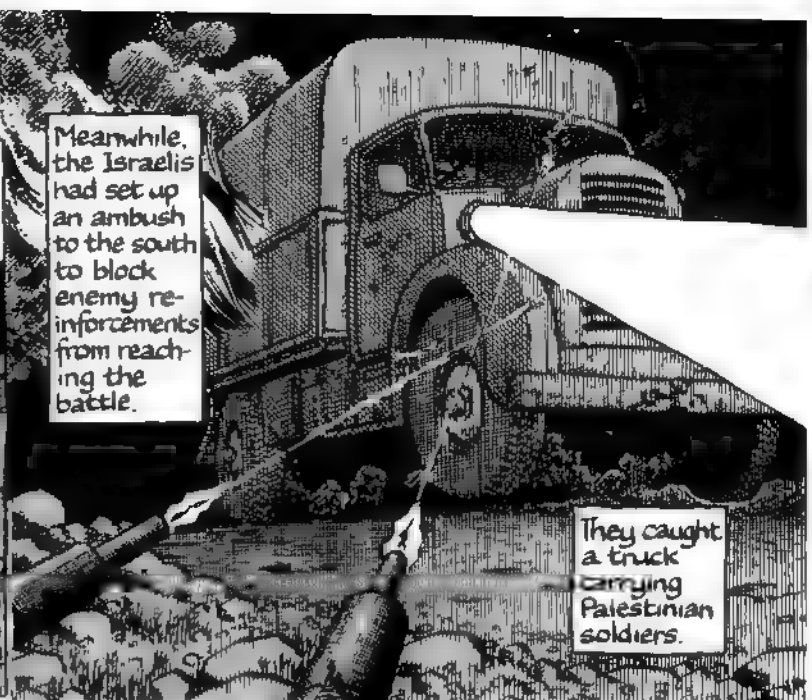
AND IT WAS TO BE HIT AND RUN



The battle was unexpectedly fierce. Israeli paratroopers, commanded by Ariel Sharon, lost eight men, the Egyptian-led defenders about twice as many. Two civilians also died.



Meanwhile, the Israelis had set up an ambush to the south to block enemy reinforcements from reaching the battle.



They caught a truck carrying Palestinian soldiers.



IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD THEY WERE ATTACKED, AND ALL WERE KILLED.

ALL OF THEM WERE PALESTINIAN.*

NATURALLY THE NEWS AFFECTED ME...

I BEGAN YELLING AND SHOUTING

I STILL HAD 16 DAYS BEFORE I WOULD BE ALLOWED OUT.

* ACCORDING TO UNTSO COMMANDER LT GENERAL BURNS, 22 SOLDIERS WERE KILLED AND 13 WOUNDED, "MOSTLY" PALESTINIAN

The incident had immediate repercussions. The next morning riots broke out in Gaza's refugee camps against the Egyptian authorities and the UN. A few Palestinian protestors were shot dead by Egyptian soldiers. Palestinians beat Egyptian troops in the street.



A SEMI-REVOLUTION HAPPENED HERE

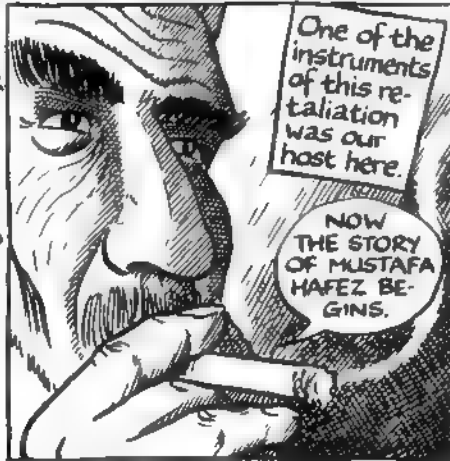
JEMAL ABDEL NASSER HAD TO RESPOND TO THIS ATTACK BECAUSE OF THE PRESSURE OF THE PEOPLE.

And Nasser's dream to unite and lead the Arab world, which depended on his prestige, might have suffered a fatal blow if the Israelis could get away with such an audacious incursion.

OUR SUCCESS MEANT A HUMILIATION FOR NASSER.



The second decision was to strike back at Israel in a way that would satisfy Arab anger without escalating to an all-out war, which, incidentally, Nasser could not risk until the new arms were available.



(Actually, Hafez's story had already started. He was the same Egyptian intelligence officer who complained about Palestinian troops instigating incidents along the border.



"On March 13, 1955, at 10 o'clock at night, I was alone in my prison cell. I heard footsteps. I pretended to be asleep.



"Then suddenly the light went on. I found Mustafa Hafez standing at the head of my bed.



"Mustafa Hafez remembered me because I was an old soldier - infantry and cavalry.



"I found some people waiting. This group had been assembled by Mustafa Hafez. They said they wouldn't carry out any military operation without me."



"Mustafa Hafez gave us the details about the operation we were going to do. Where and when."



THEN WE WENT OUT AND WE SUCCEEDED.

IT WAS A VERY SUCCESSFUL OPERATION.

AND WE LOST NO ONE IN THIS BATTLE.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE THAT OPERATION AT ALL?

I CAN, BUT I DON'T NEED TO.



Over the next few months, the Egyptians recruited a core of militants to establish a Palestinian guerrilla group.

"Most of them came from jail."



"Mustafa Hafez recruited the ones who had been crossing the border... to steal crops and food."



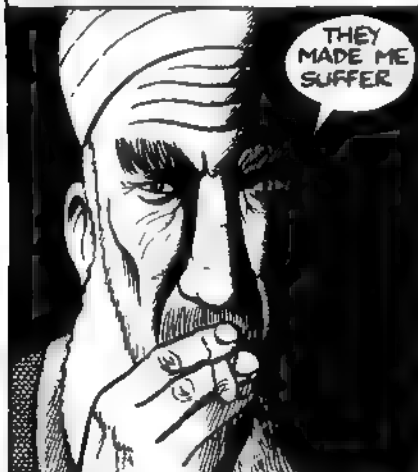
"Some murderers."



"He collected 125 of them and sent them for training."



I ask how he, a professional military man, was able to mix with these recruits, many of whom were criminals.



THEY MADE ME SUFFER

EACH ONE STARTED TO ACT THE CLEVER FELLOW, TO SHOW OFF AS IF ORDERS DIDN'T APPLY TO HIM.



AT FIRST I CLASHED WITH THEM.

BUT THEN I ABSORBED THEIR MADNESS.



MADNESS.

YES!

THE WANTED

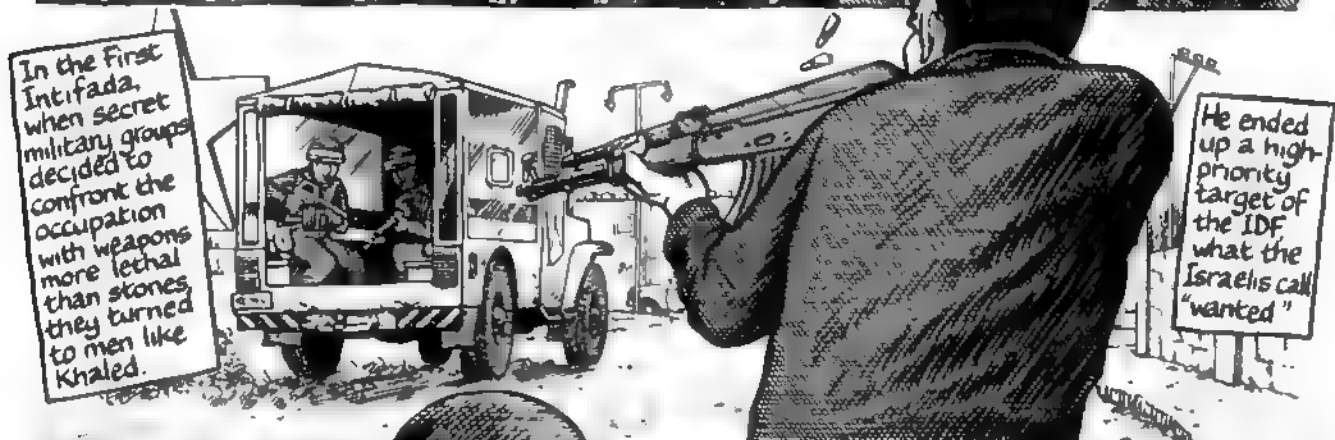
That old fedayee, he's a piece of work. He's marinated in ruminations of political betrayals and stewed for decades in remembrances of military ineptitudes. He loses track of the catastrophe at hand, '56, which he abandons in mid-sentence to tug at some other dagger in his heart—the Faluja Pocket in '48, for instance, or the annihilation of Arab armor in '67...

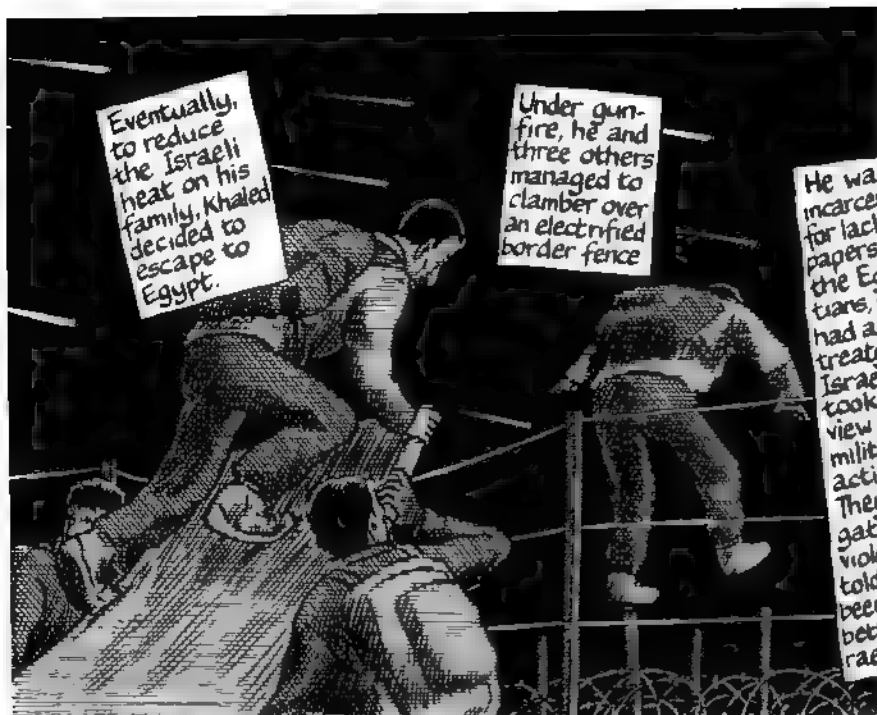
I plead with him, I even bargain: Okay, you answer two or three questions about '56—just two or three—and then I'll listen raptly to any episode you'd like.

He overflows with history. I cannot use, and I do not bother to sop it up.

His day has passed, and his battle has been inherited by men like Khaled, who started fighting long after the old man stopped.

Khaled joined Fatah, the mainstream PLO faction headed by Arafat, at age 14.





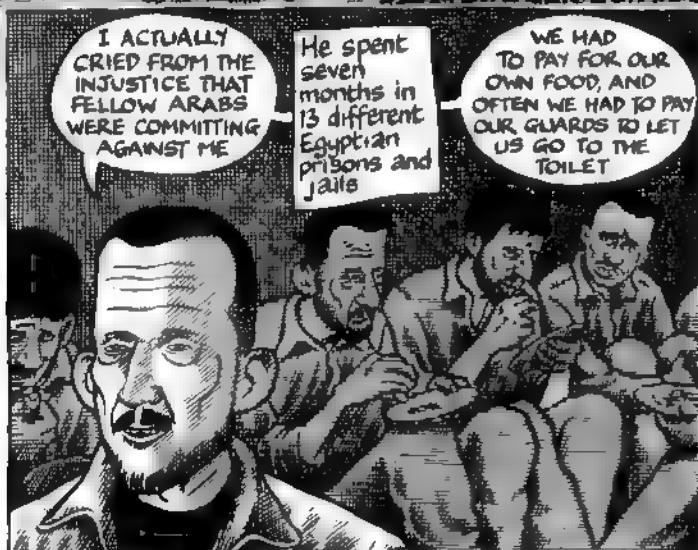
Eventually, to reduce the Israeli heat on his family, Khaled decided to escape to Egypt.

Under gunfire, he and three others managed to clamber over an electrified border fence

He was incarcerated for lack of papers by the Egyptians, who had a peace treaty with Israel and took a sour view of his militant activities. They interrogated him violently. He told them he'd been treated better in Israeli custody



YOU'RE COMPARING US TO THE JEWS?!

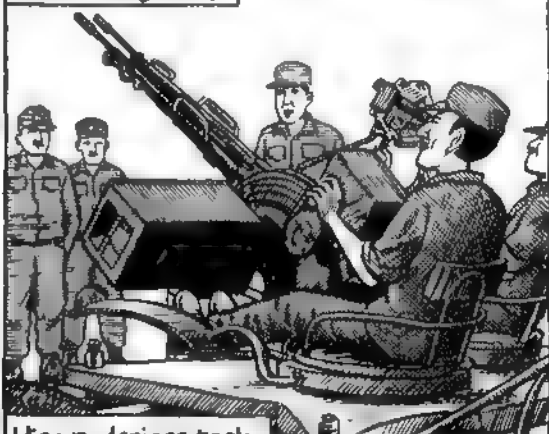


I ACTUALLY CRIED FROM THE INJUSTICE THAT FELLOW ARABS WERE COMMITTING AGAINST ME

He spent seven months in 13 different Egyptian prisons and jails

WE HAD TO PAY FOR OUR OWN FOOD, AND OFTEN WE HAD TO PAY OUR GUARDS TO LET US GO TO THE TOILET

He was deported to Libya, where he joined a PLO training camp.



His wanderings took him as far afield as Sweden and Hungary.

When the Oslo agreements were signed and Israel permitted many Palestinian militants living abroad to return home, Khaled's name was not on the list. He found his own way back to Gaza in a three-month journey that took him from safe house to safe house...



across Egypt's World War II minefields...



and by motorboat to the shores of his homeland



"They gave me my Kalashnikov, and I fired into the sky."



"All my neighbors, the old women, came to embrace me."



"My father came out the door and when he saw me he fainted."



But Khaled knows I'm searching for guerrillas from another time, and he introduces me to his uncle, who might know someone I could talk to.



Khaled's uncle is a jocular man who was a guerrilla himself as the PLO emerged as the primary Palestinian resistance movement in the 1960s.



But his day has passed, too, and his struggle reduced to several well-worn stories and a nod to where his arm used to be.

I ask him what he thinks of his nephew's militancy.

I ADVISED HIM NOT TO BE INVOLVED IN THE RESISTANCE.

IT DOESN'T HELP.

WHEN WE WERE IN JORDAN WE COULD GO IN, SHOOT, AND WITHDRAW

AND WE HAD MANY MORE WEAPONS

NOW IT'S CHAOS.

IN THIS FIGHTING IT'S LIKE WE'RE SHOOTING BLANKS

THEY HAVE MACHINES AND AMERICAN SUPPORT.

HE'S SPEAKING OUT OF FEAR FOR ME.

I AGREE THAT THAT TIME WAS DIFFERENT.

DOES IT MEAN THAT IF YOU HAVEN'T GOT THE MEANS, YOU STOP RESISTING?

Khaled's uncle talks approvingly about the recent ambush in Hebron that killed 12 Israeli soldiers and settler militiamen

But as to the Jerusalem bus bombing a few days ago-

-IT'S WRONG.

AN OLD MAN? A SMALL CHILD? WOMEN GOING SHOPPING?

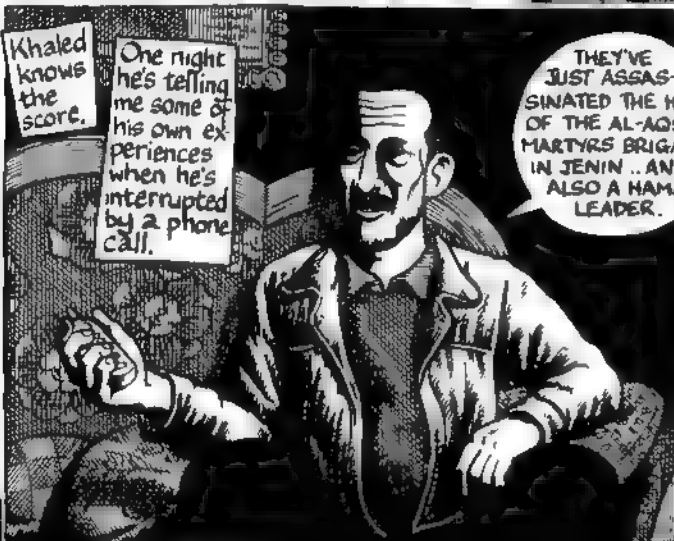
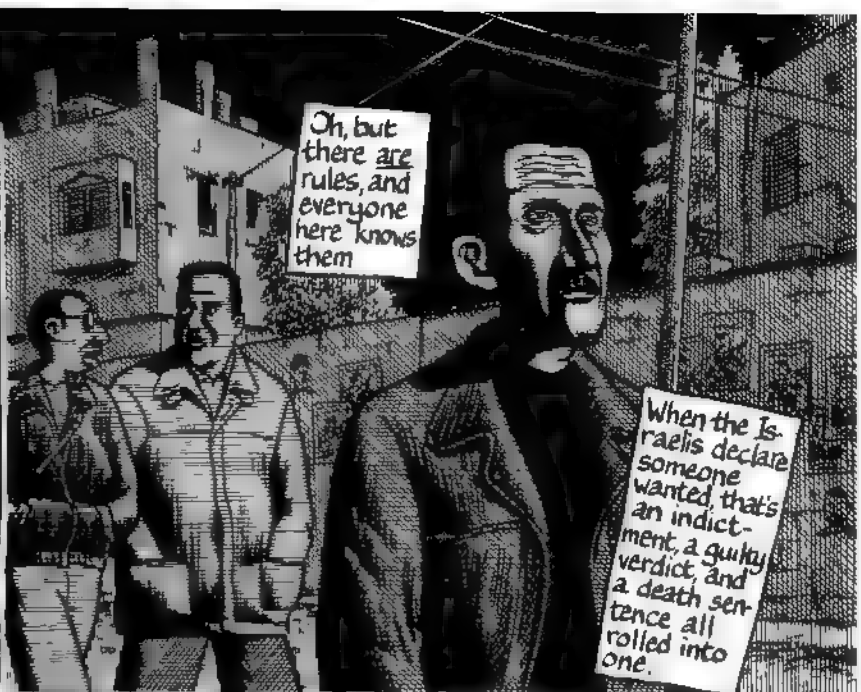
WHY KILL THEM?

EVEN A SOLDIER, IF HE GIVES HIMSELF UP, YOU DON'T KILL HIM.

IF YOU GIVE YOURSELF UP TO THE JEWS, THEY TAKE CARE OF YOU

I'M NEVER HAPPY WHEN I HEAR THAT ISRAELI WOMEN OR CHILDREN ARE KILLED

LET THEM LIVE





Sure, I'm told, but he doesn't get to see much of Khaled. The boy insists on being woken up to play with his dad no matter what time he shows up.



Khaled's wife is expecting again. Khaled says her relatives encourage her to have more children as soon as possible.



They wonder how much longer Khaled has to live.



RESISTANCE AND THE SULTA

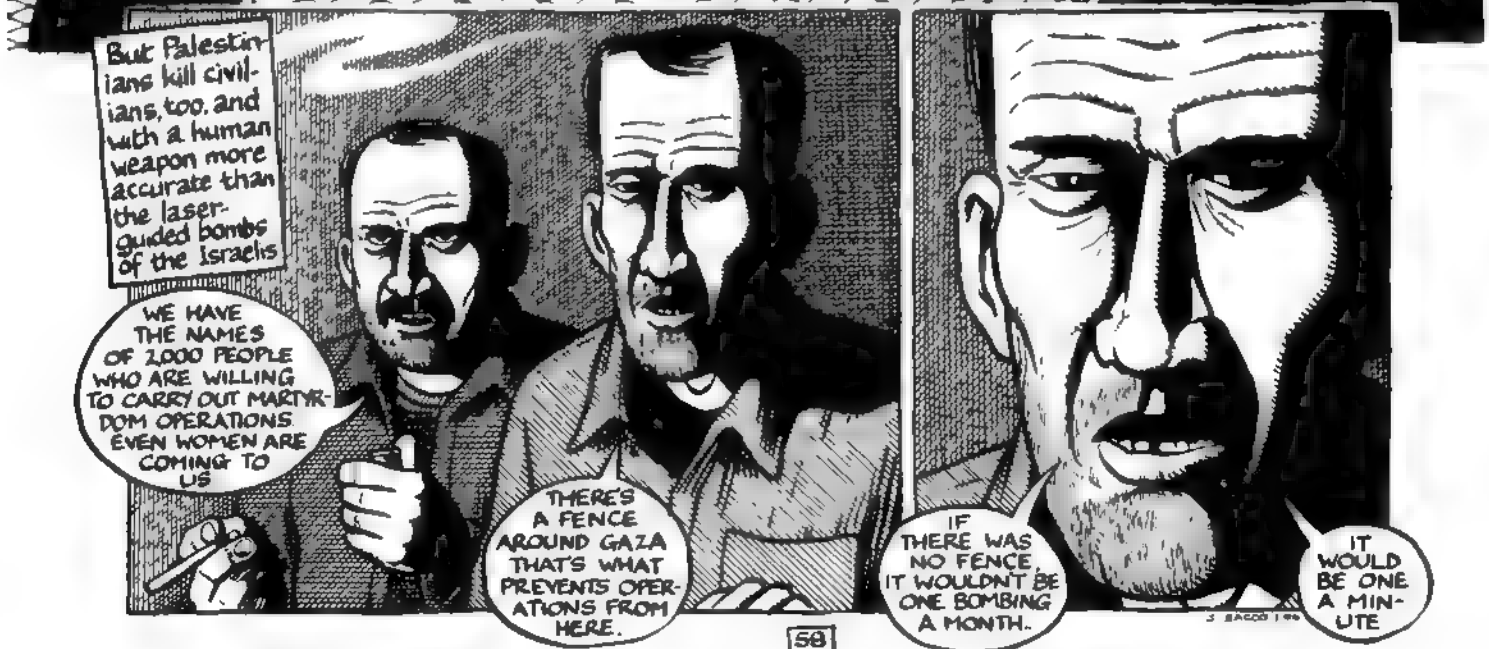
Last night the Israelis entered northern Khan Younis to destroy the home of a guy who'd blown himself up at the nearby Mawasi checkpoint. Tonight we expect the Israelis to do the same to the home of a second bomber who'd blown himself up in tandem

We are waiting for news of the incursion at Abed's friend's place when three dudes crash our gathering

They are moving away from the area the Israelis are expected to attack.

SALAAM ALEIKUM.

They have the same red eyes as Khaled





Abu Ahmed, who works for a different security service, also refused to participate in the arrests of Islamic militants.

In the First Intifada-

-I ATE WITH THEM AND SLEPT NEAR THEM AND WAS IN PRISON WITH THEM.

AND WE CONSIDERED OURSELVES BROTHERS.

THE GUY WHO USED TO GUIDE MY PRAYERS IN THE MOSQUE WAS FROM HAMAS

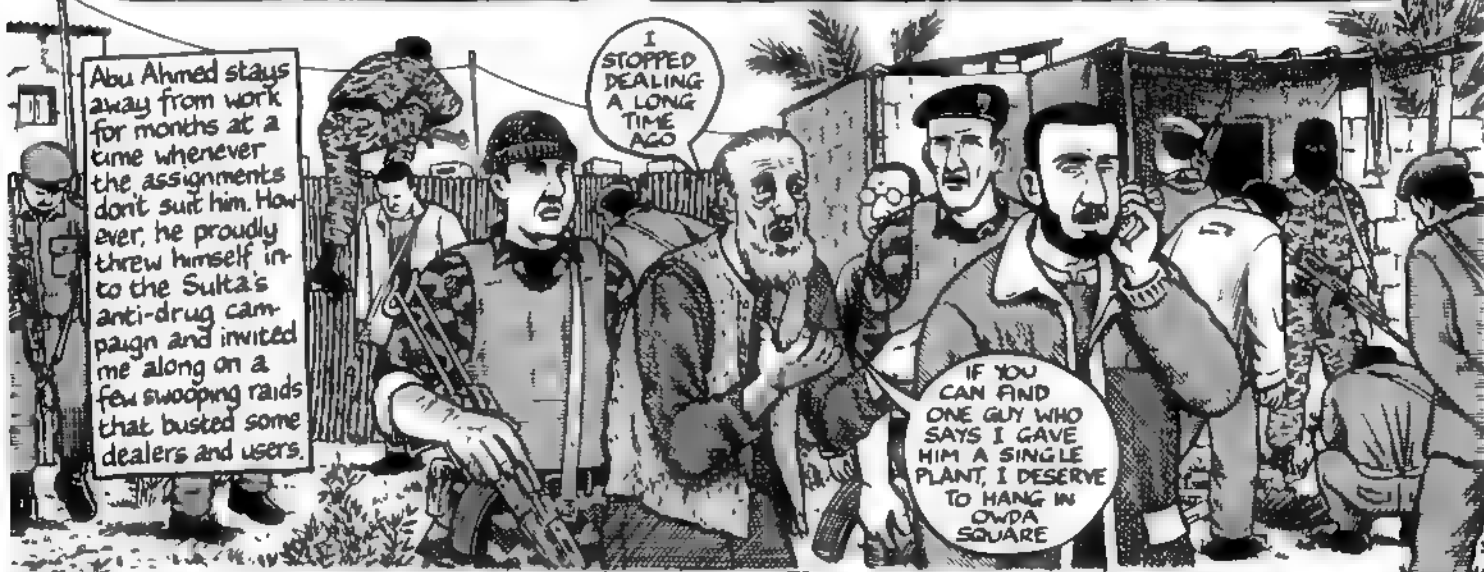
IT'S UNIMAGINABLE THAT I WOULD ARREST HIM



Abu Ahmed stays away from work for months at a time whenever the assignments don't suit him. However, he proudly threw himself in to the Sulta's anti-drug campaign and invited me along on a few swooping raids that busted some dealers and users.

I STOPPED DEALING A LONG TIME AGO

IF YOU CAN FIND ONE GUY WHO SAYS I GAVE HIM A SINGLE PLANT, I DESERVE TO HANG IN OWDA SQUARE



Khaled, however, wouldn't even participate in that popular government crack down because he feared being drawn into more objectionable assignments. To quote an Arabic expression:

THE FIRST STEP TO DANCING IS MOVING



But, I ask, don't you owe anything to the Sulta for your salary?

I'VE DONE MANY THINGS FOR THIS LAND

NOT FOR THE SULTA

BUT I'VE SERVED ALL MY LIFE FOR THE LAND, UNLIKE THE PEOPLE WHO DO NOTHING AND STILL GET SALARIES

LET ME BE ONE OF THEM.





He, too, is
contemp-
tuous of
his pay-
masters.

They would
wish away
the resist-
ance to hang
on to their
ill-gotten
gains and
the glitzy
perks of calm.

ALL
THOSE
HIGH SULTA
OFFICERS HAVE
PERSONAL INTER-
ESTS

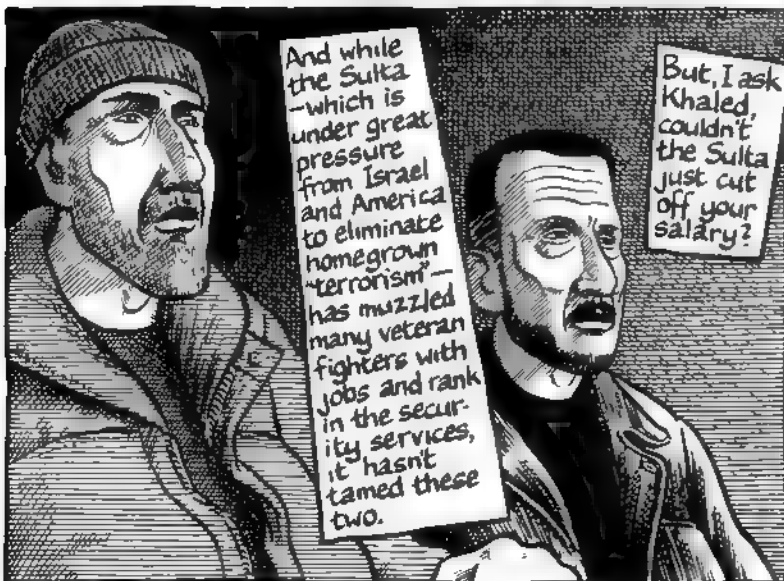
THEY
TOOK THE
COCA-COLA
COMPANY THEY
TOOK THE GAS
COMPANY.

THEY
HAVE BREAK-
FAST IN TEL AVIV,
DINNER IN HAIFA
AND THEY DANCE
IN JERUSA-
LEM.

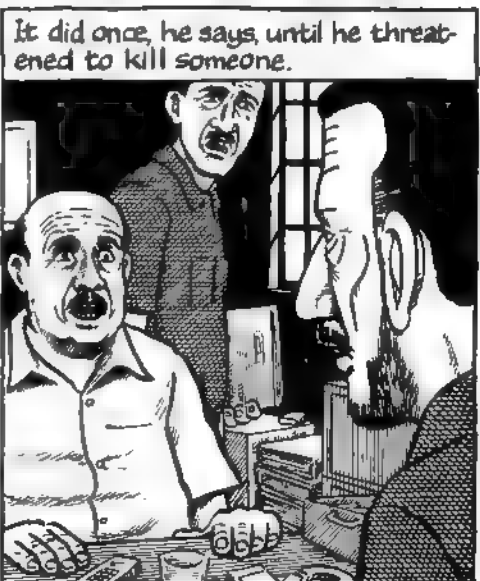
THEY
HAVE NO
PROB-
LEMS.

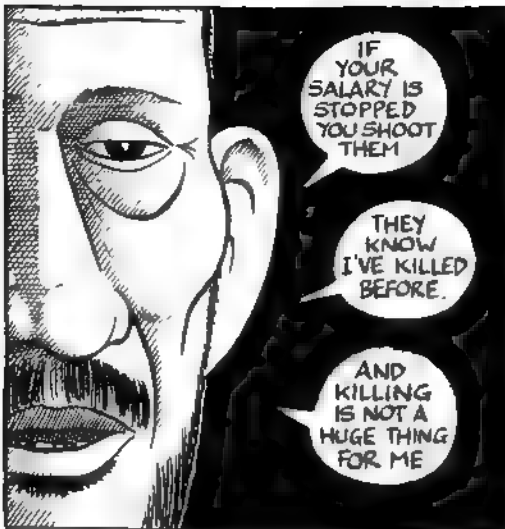


THE
RESISTANCE
IS IMPOSED
ON THE
SULTA.



But, I ask
Khaled,
couldn't
the Sulta
just cut
off your
salary?





IF YOUR SALARY IS STOPPED YOU SHOOT THEM

THEY KNOW I'VE KILLED BEFORE.

AND KILLING IS NOT A HUGE THING FOR ME

Especially in southern Gaza in a place like Rafah, for example, the Sulta's control is tenuous. Says Atlee: "They know we can turn the city upside-down in a few minutes and get the public behind us. Because we are respected among the people."



In fact, Khaled tells me, when the Sulta arrested some comrades in the Popular Resistance Committees, he helped lead demonstrators who freed the men and burned down the building where they'd been held.

So the Sulta teeters, impotent, caught between the occupation and the resistance, neither a proper policeman for the Israelis nor a competent defender of Palestinian lives and land.



Finally, the Israelis have decided to destroy the "terrorists" themselves.

while the Palestinian militants have made it their job to drive out the occupiers.

But no one doubts who has the power and who is winning

The only question now is how far the Israelis will push their victory or how far the Palestinians can take their defeat.

THE FEDAYEEN PT.2

Dear Reader,
we have arrived at another losing proposition, the fedayeen campaign of August 1955

and within inches of my tape recorder, swirling inside the skull of this old man, are perhaps the last extant memories of a participant in that crucial episode along our story's bloody path.

Unfortunately, he is beating around the bush...

THE FEDAYEE'S WORK IS TO ATTACK AND ESCAPE! ESCAPE QUICKLY!

obfuscating...

WHEN WE ATTACKED ..IF 100 OF US WERE KILLED AND WE KILLED TWO, WE WERE HAPPY

holding back...

BUT WE DID VERY GOOD WORK AT THAT TIME, PRAISE BE TO GOD.

CAN I INTERRUPT YOU PLEASE?

I'M LOOKING FOR YOUR EXPERIENCES AS AN INDIVIDUAL

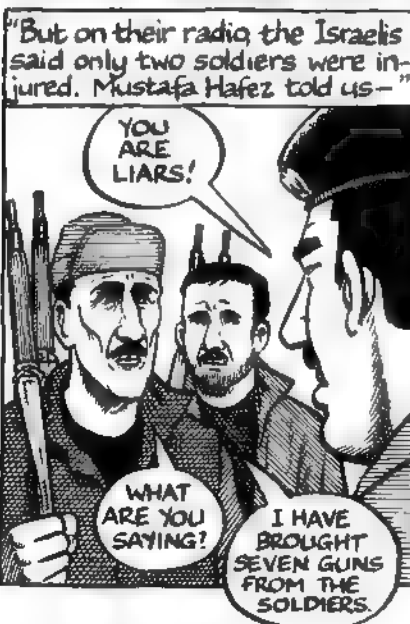
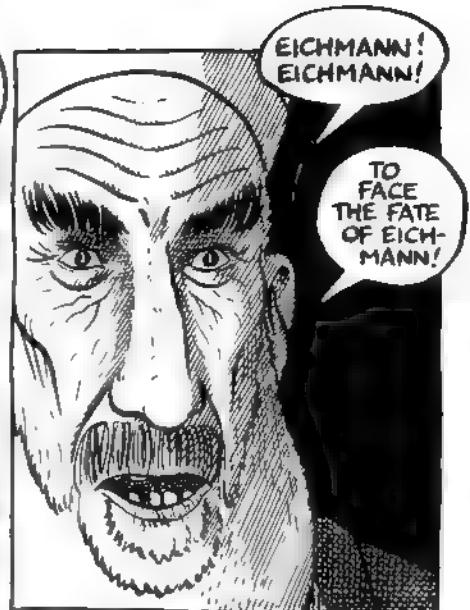
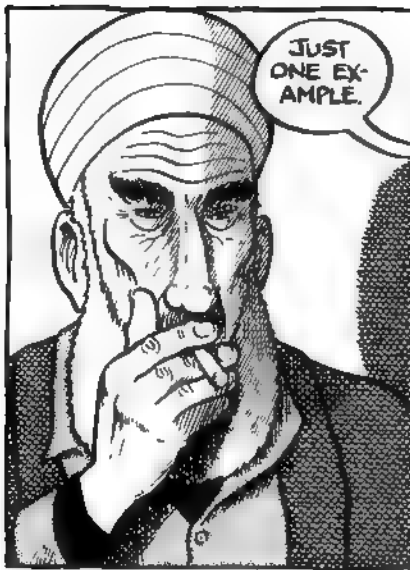
I DON'T LIKE TO SPEAK ABOUT MYSELF

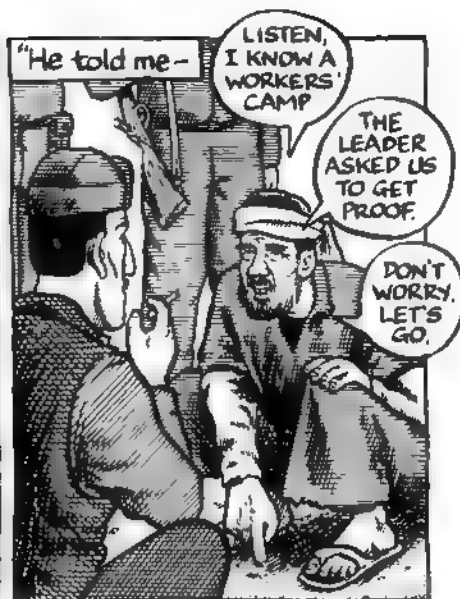
NOW WE WILL TALK ABOUT THE REVOLUTION IN '67, THE PALESTINIAN REVOLUTION...

I am a split second from tuning him out for good, but his son, sensing my frustration, steers him back to '55.

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT SOMETHING, JUST SAY, 'NO, I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT THAT.'

BUT I WOULD LIKE TO GET AN EXAMPLE OF AN OPERATION.





"We went there. We didn't even come across guards



"We entered the tents and we killed them all. There was no resistance, nothing

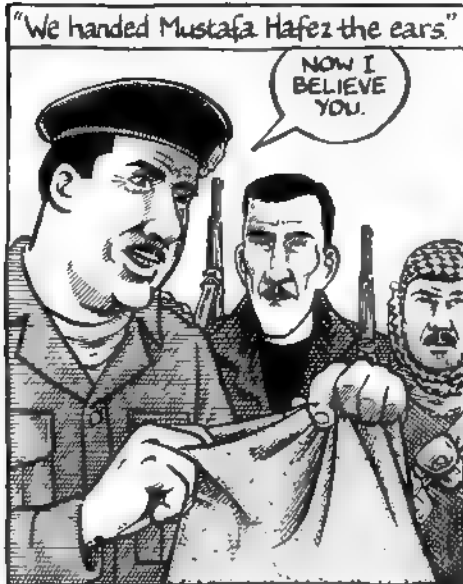


"The only thing that happened is one of them stood up and stated his nationality.

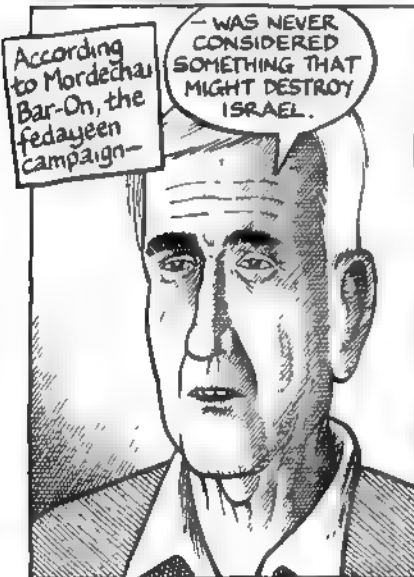


"I had a big knife. I cut off their ears.





The old guerrilla doesn't tell me whether this episode took place during this, the first fedayeen campaign. In that week-long assault Israel reported 15 fatalities, five soldiers and ten civilians.



"But it was taken very seriously because of the impact on the general morale, especially on the border. In two or three places settlers evacuated their settlements and new people had to be brought in."



"The fedayeen...were considered something that could not be tolerated."

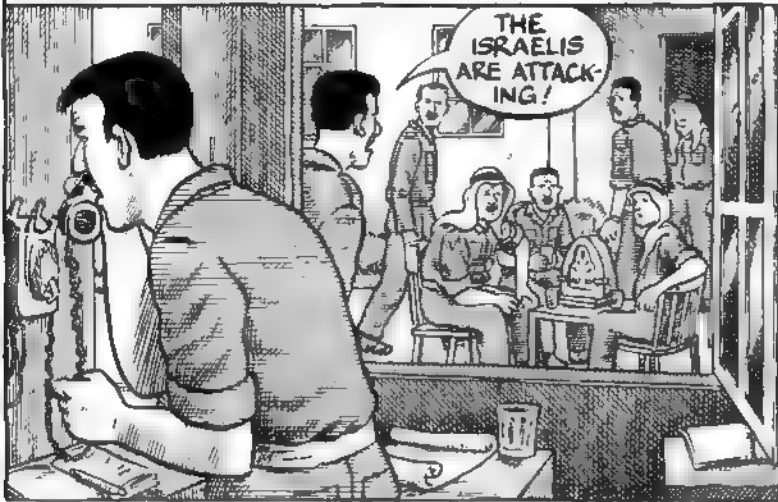
On the night of August 31, 1955, Israel responded to the fedayeen raids with a devastating attack on the Khan Yunis police station.



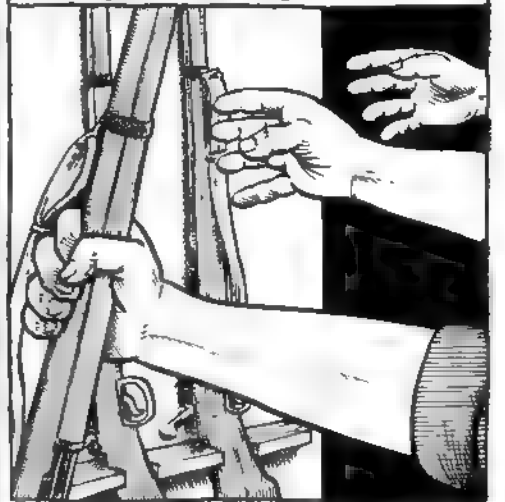
He seems like another tired old man in a room full of tired men until I discover he was a policeman on duty that night some 50 years ago.



"It was 8pm exactly because we were listening to the news at the time on Nasser's radio station..."



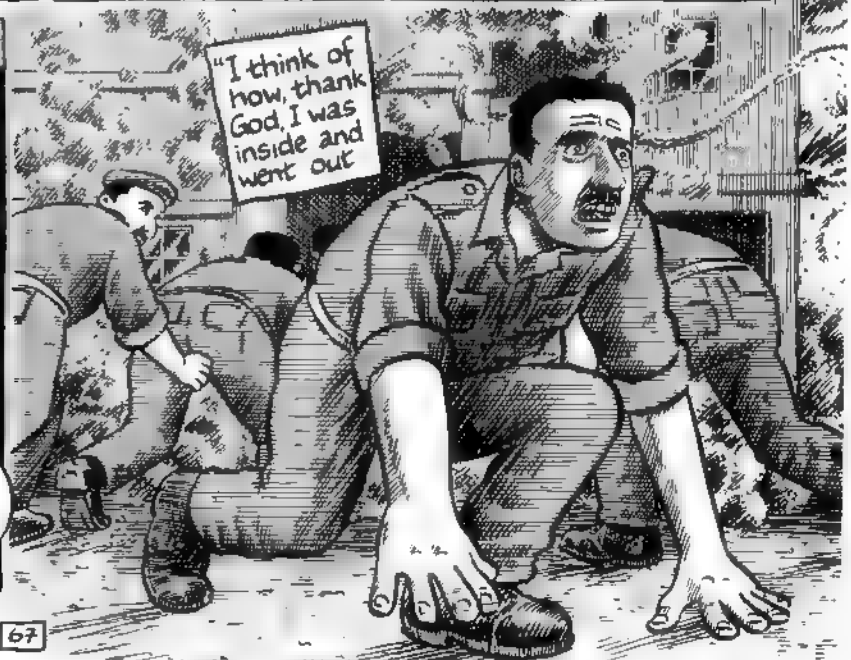
"I entered the building... Everyone who had a gun took his gun."



"...and at that moment the shells started falling."

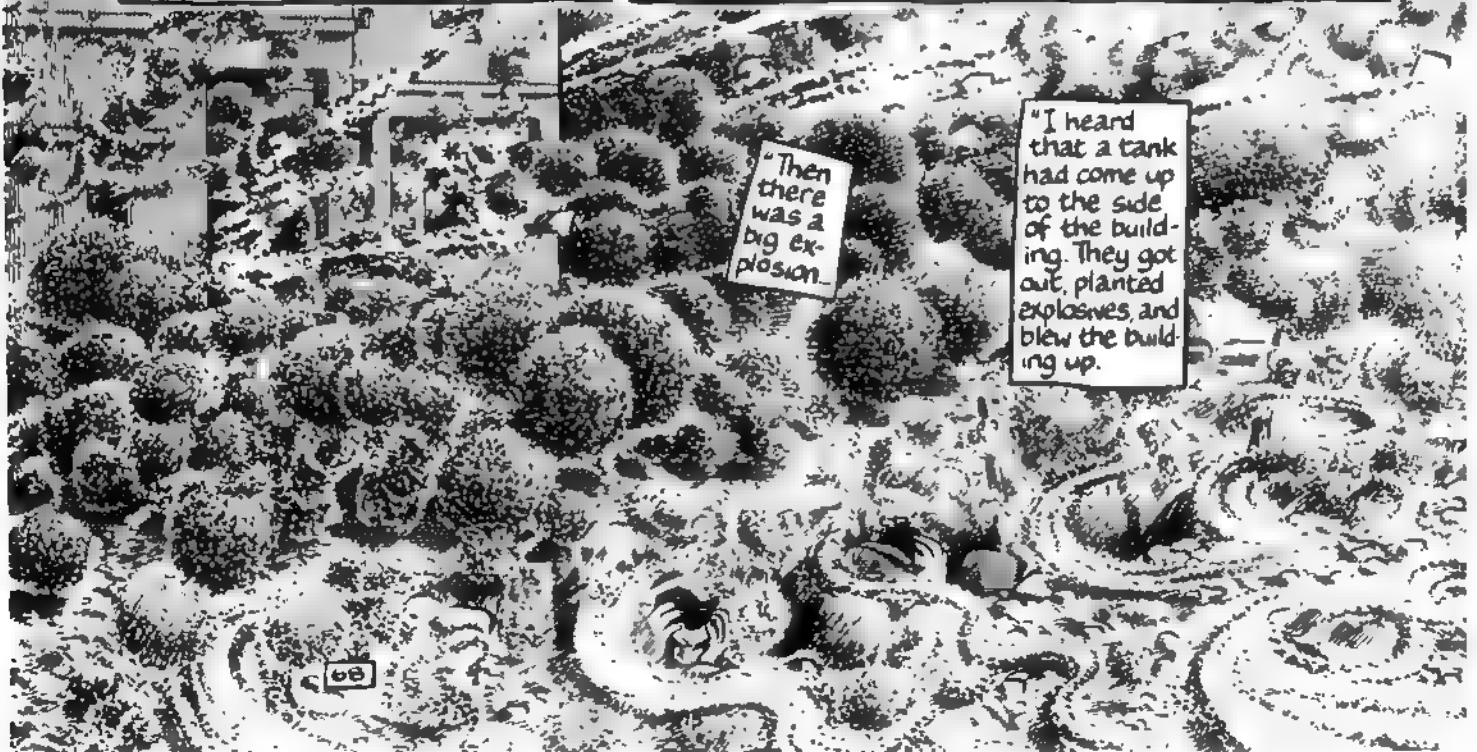


"Some people who had been outside were going inside for protection, and there were people inside who wanted to get out."





"There was a lot of shelling. You couldn't see from the smoke and the sand and the dust."



"Two floors on the south side collapsed. The whole south side."

I ask what happened to the men inside

MAY GOD KEEP THAT EVIL FROM YOU.

"They had all been our friends and comrades."

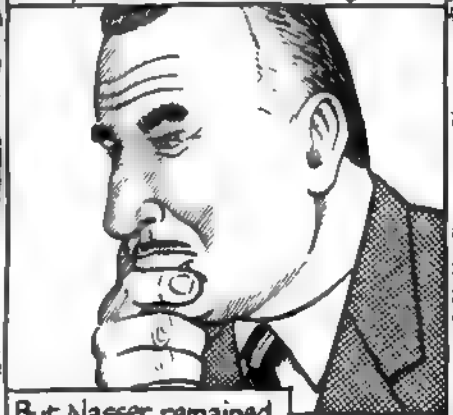
"Most of them were good men, and God bless them."

"You'd find a body crushed by stones and just the legs sticking out."

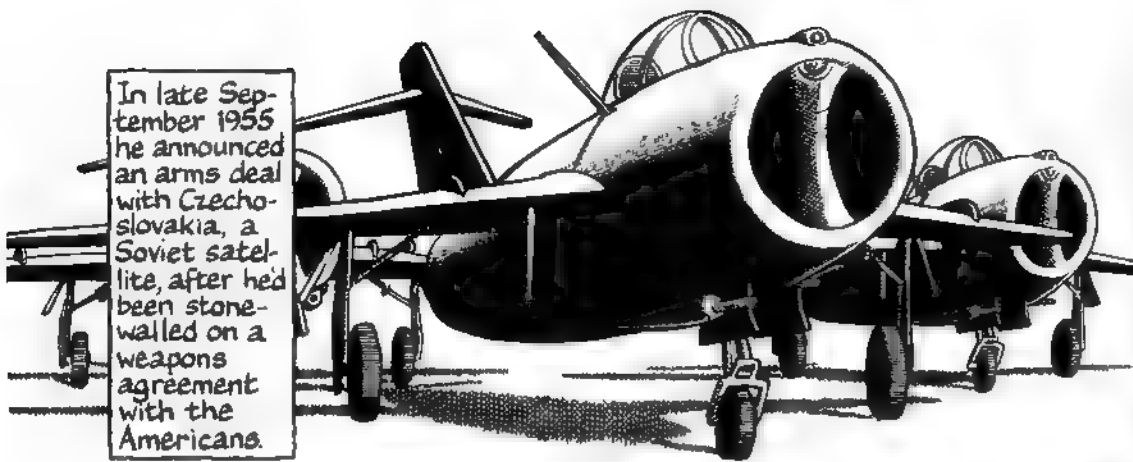
"There were people who were completely buried."

The Egyptians reported 72 dead, both Egyptians and Palestinians. The U.N. observers confirmed about half that number.

Nasser suspended the fedayeen campaign. His Egyptian and Palestinian forces had shown an inability to repulse Israeli retaliatory raids.



But Nasser remained as determined as ever to tilt the balance of power in Egypt's favor.



In late September 1955 he announced an arms deal with Czechoslovakia, a Soviet satellite, after he'd been stonewalled on a weapons agreement with the Americans.

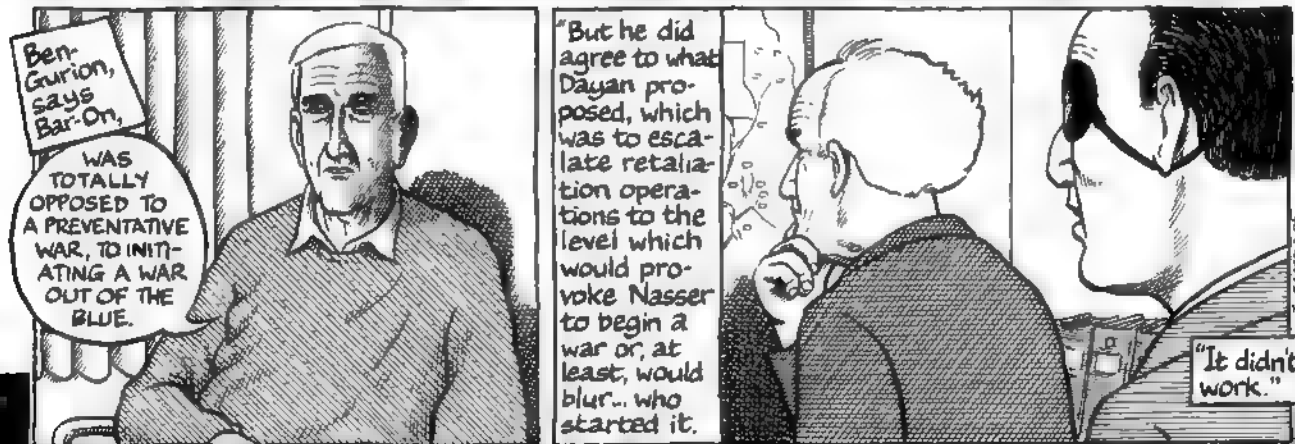
For the West, this development inaugurated a new and alarming theater—the Arab world—in its Cold War with the Soviets; for Israel, the arms deal was considered a threat to its regional dominance if not a challenge to its very existence.



After general elections, Ben-Gurion replaced Sharett as Israel's prime minister.

The hardliners were now ascendant and determined to start a war with Egypt before it could obtain and incorporate the modern Soviet aircraft and tanks.

According to Bar-On, "many many Israelis, high officials were clamoring for a preventative strike on Egypt," but Ben-Gurion feared the reaction of the Americans and especially the British, who were treaty-bound with the French to guarantee the borders of the Middle East.



Ben-Gurion, says Bar-On, WAS TOTALLY OPPOSED TO A PREVENTATIVE WAR, TO INITIATING A WAR OUT OF THE BLUE.

"But he did agree to what Dayan proposed, which was to escalate retaliation operations to the level which would provoke Nasser to begin a war or, at least, would blur... who started it.

"It didn't work."



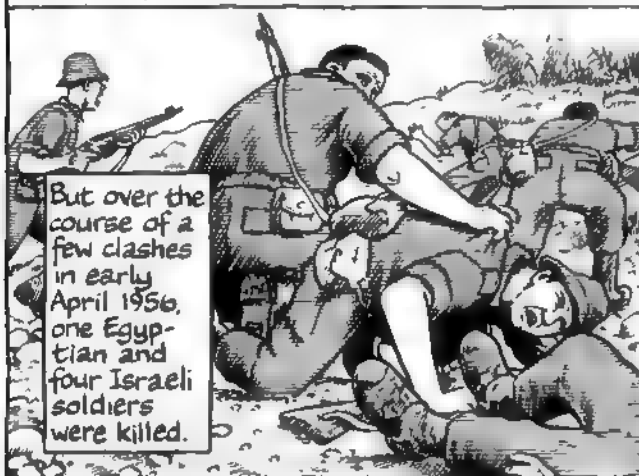
Nasser did not take the bait despite continued raids on Gaza and the Sinai that killed scores of Arabs and a deadly strike against Syria, with whom Cairo had recently signed a mutual defense pact.

Unable to trigger a war, Israel reverted to a defensive posture, according to Bar-On



Israel had already started procuring weapons from France to outmatch the quality of the Soviet weapons ordered by Egypt.

A period of relative calm prevailed. Egypt had stopped its infiltrations from Gaza, and despite shooting incidents along the armistice demarcation line, no Israeli had been killed for months.

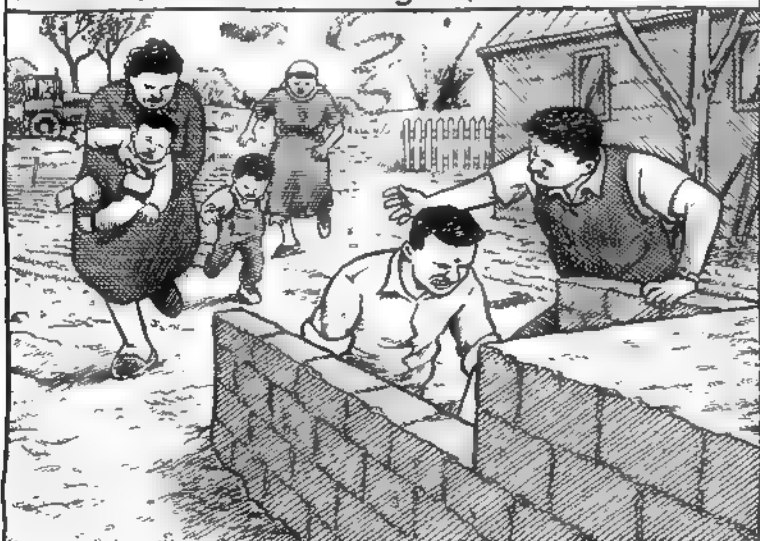


But over the course of a few clashes in early April 1956, one Egyptian and four Israeli soldiers were killed.

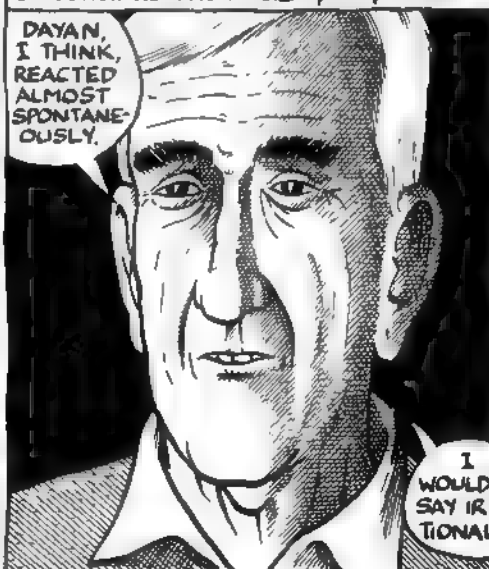
Then, on April 5, a far deadlier incident occurred. According to U.S. Army Lt. Col. R. F. Bayard, chairman of UNTSO's Egyptian-Israeli armistice liaison commission, Israeli mortars fired on an Egyptian position, which led to exchanges of mortar fire along the entire border line.



Bar-On tells me that the Egyptians fired heavy mortars at "two or three kibbutzim, and it became quite hot," though Bayard reported that UNTSO could not determine which side had fired at civilian targets first.



In any case, five Israeli civilians and two soldiers were wounded that day, and to continue the Israeli perspective...



DAYAN, I THINK, REACTED ALMOST SPONTANEOUSLY.

I WOULDN'T SAY IRRATIONALLY.

"He was a rational person, but there was an element of anger, I think. To hell with you! If you're shelling our kibbutzim, which are civilian targets, I'll show you!"

"And he gave the order to hit Gaza."

"Not much."

"It was one or two bar-rages."

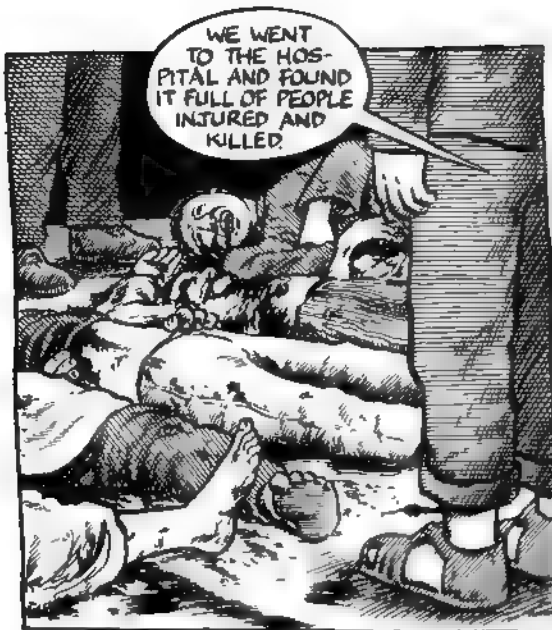
Israeli heavy mortar shells landed "all along the main street" of Gaza City "at a time when the streets are most crowded," according to Bayard's re-claimed the Israelis used "the old trick of laying down one or two rounds and waiting sev- eral minutes for a crowd to form be- fore return- original target... Thus many casualties."

About 50 Palestinian civilians were killed and 100 wounded.

According to Bayard, the Israeli claim that they were firing 120mm mortar at mil- itary targets in Gaza is in my opinion an out- right lie. "The nearest Egyp- tian military po- sition was one kilometer away."

The attack brought an immediate response from Nasser.

He reac- tivated the fed- ayeen



WE MOVED QUICKLY TO FORM IN GROUPS.

AND EVERYONE CHOSE HIS TARGET AND ENTERED ISRAEL



The second fedayeen assault, April 7-12, 1956, cost the lives of ten or 11 Israelis, including children murdered in an attack on a synagogue at Moshav Shafir.



Fedayeen losses were high, and international pressure came to bear on Nasser, who halted the campaign before the Israelis launched an all-out war on Egypt.

Nasser!

The mention of the Egyptian leader's name makes the old guerrilla shudder.

WHEN YOU LOOKED AT NASSER YOU GOT SCARED!

HE WAS DARK!

BLACK!

He says Nasser used the fedayeen's limited attacks on Israel to "brighten his face" with the Arab people.

JEMAL ABDEL NASSER EXPLOITED US, HE USED US FOR HIS OWN POPULARITY.

...THE GOALS OF EGYPT'S LEADERS WERE DIFFERENT FROM OURS

Recall, many of the original fedayeen had been criminals or, like the old guerrilla here, soldiers who had once angered the Egyptian authorities by making freelance attacks on Israelis.

THIS IS A SECRET...AND THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I'VE TOLD IT.

I DISCOVERED THAT THE EGYPTIAN AIM WAS TO GET RID OF ALL OF US BECAUSE THEY CONSIDERED US TROUBLE-MAKERS.

And Nasser may have had no interest in creating too potent a Palestinian guerrilla force whose loyalties were not, ultimately, to Egypt.

"Israeli armored vehicles used to chase us...When we...requested anti-tank rifles we were rejected, rejected, rejected. We had the Carl-Gustav rifle. It was useless against those vehicles.



"Mustafa Hafez told us:

I'M WITH YOU, BUT I CAN'T DO ANYTHING ABOUT YOUR REQUEST...I RECEIVE MY ORDERS FROM EGYPT

Sometimes Mustafa Hafez got upset. He would locate positions that could be attacked but Egypt told him no."

Whether or not Hafez felt caught between his Egyptian superiors and his mostly Palestinian cadres was of little concern to the Israelis, who assassinated him with a package bomb on July 11, 1956.

"We took him to Cairo and buried him...I cried very much. And his mother was crying with me, trying to stop me from crying...We were crying more than the women. He was very dear to all of us."

MUSTAFA HAFEZ DIED, AND WE DIED.

AFTER HIM, WE DID NO MORE OPERATIONS WORTH TALKING ABOUT.



Discipline unraveled among a new group of recruits who had joined the fedayeen during Hafez's tenure but who would have been discharged, the old guerrilla contends, had Hafez lived.

"Many rules were broken."

"They made trouble and created many problems."

"They stole gold and attacked women."

"We looked bad before the people."

In his eyes, the Egyptian officer corps was also rotten starting at the top with the army's chief of staff

He says he was convinced the Israelis would retaliate for the second fedayeen campaign.

"Abdel Hakim Amer was carousing with women and drinking. We have a proverb: If the head of the family is drumming, don't blame the children for dancing."

"So his officers were just like him"

"Drunkards."

"Drug users."



I BELIEVED THE REACTION OF THE JEWS WOULD BE STRONG

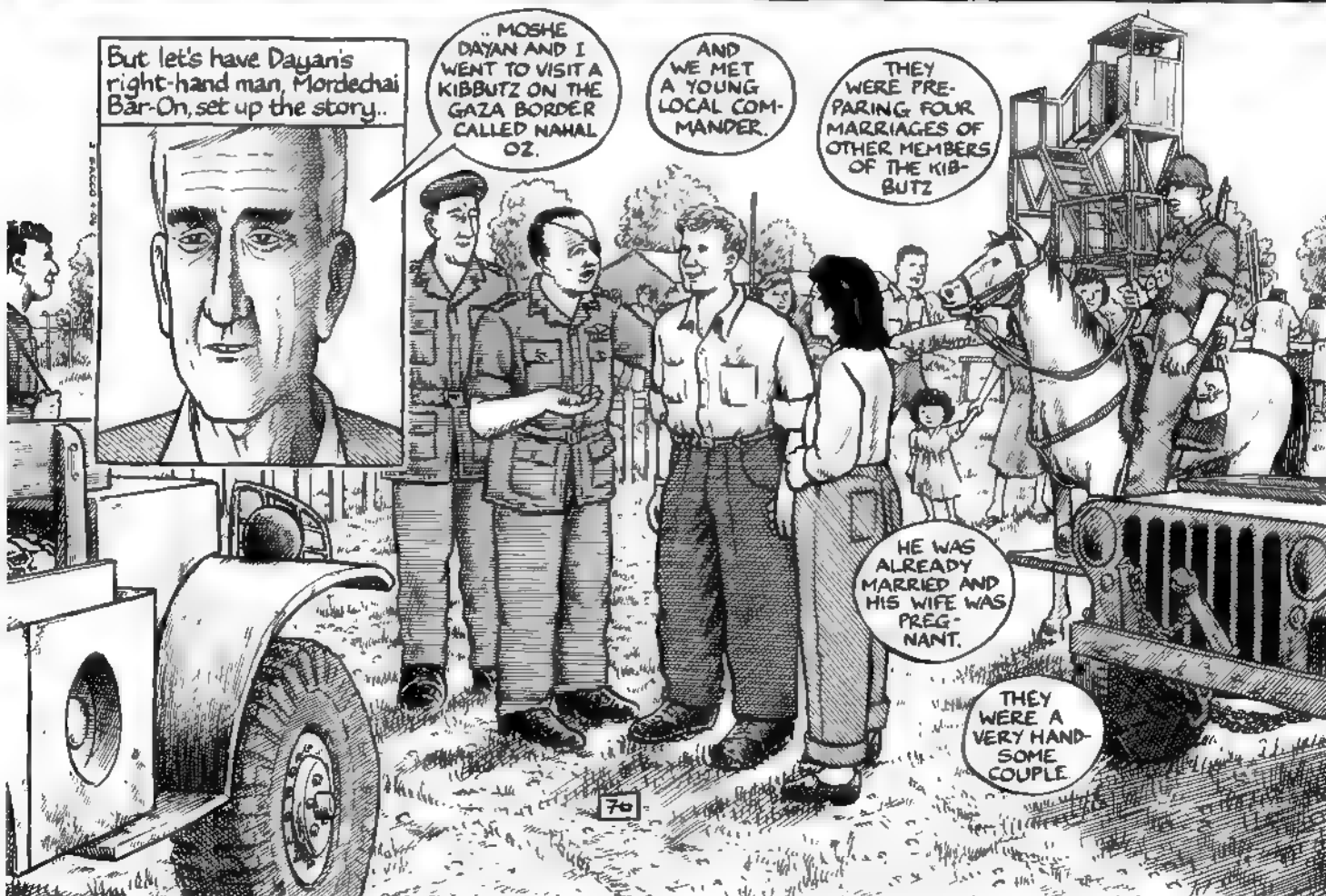
AND MANY TIMES I SHOUTED AND WARNED THE PEOPLE, 'BE CAREFUL!'

'WAKE UP!'

COLLUSION

Seldom in the whirl and fury of a struggle between nations does one side's much bloodied Achilles invite his people to consider its enemy with something even remotely approaching empathy.

On April 30, 1956 at the eulogy of Roi Rothberg, a kibbutznik killed by Gazan infiltrators, Israel's warrior-hero Moshe Dayan did just that, addressing not just Israeli motivations, but the Palestinian impetus as well.



"We had tea in their room. It was a lovely day



"We went back to Tel Aviv, and the next morning the boy was killed

"And Dayan made it a point to go back for his funeral and he gave a famous speech."

LET US NOT TODAY CAST BLAME ON THE MURDERERS.

WHAT CAN WE SAY AGAINST THEIR TERRIBLE HATRED OF US?



FOR EIGHT YEARS NOW THEY HAVE SAT IN THE REFUGEE CAMPS OF GAZA, AND HAVE WATCHED HOW, BEFORE THEIR VERY EYES, WE HAVE TURNED THEIR LANDS AND VILLAGES, WHERE THEY AND THEIR FOREFATHERS PREVIOUSLY DWELLED INTO OUR HOME

BEYOND THE BORDER SURGES A SEA OF HATRED AND REVENGE;

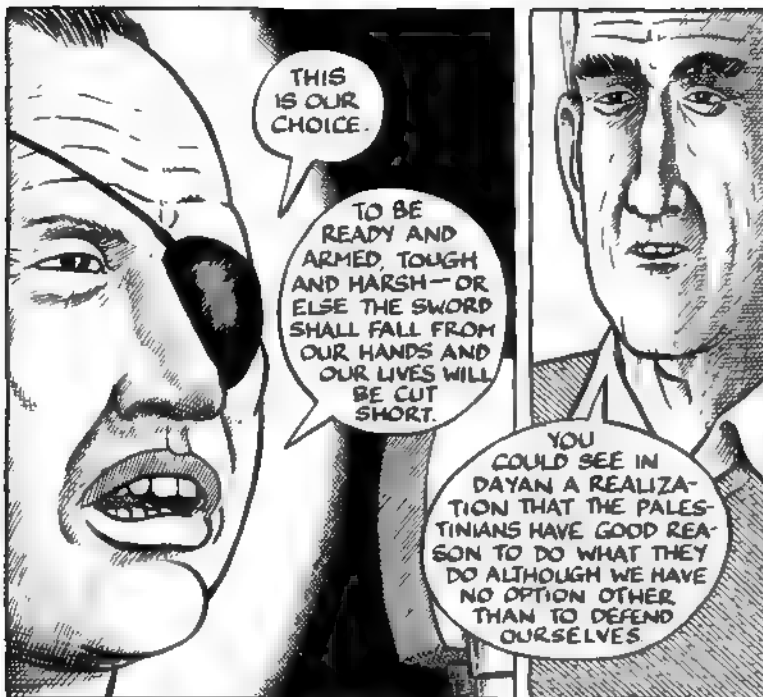


REVENGE TOWARDS THE DAY WHEN THE CALM WILL BLUNT OUR ALERTNESS,

WHEN WE SHALL LISTEN TO THE AMBASSADORS OF MALIGN HYPOCRISY WHO CALL UPON US TO LAY DOWN OUR ARMS

LET US NOT FEAR TO LOOK SQUARELY AT THE HATRED THAT CONSUMES AND FILLS THE LIVES OF [THE] ARABS WHO LIVE AROUND US..

THAT IS THE FATE OF OUR GENERATION.



THIS IS OUR CHOICE.

TO BE READY AND ARMED, TOUGH AND HARSH—OR ELSE THE SWORD SHALL FALL FROM OUR HANDS AND OUR LIVES WILL BE CUT SHORT.

YOU COULD SEE IN DAYAN A REALIZATION THAT THE PALESTINIANS HAVE GOOD REASON TO DO WHAT THEY DO ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NO OPTION OTHER THAN TO DEFEND OURSELVES

According to Bar-On, Dayan had decided that Palestinian infiltrators would have to be stopped once and for all, and that meant one course of action.

HE WANTED TO CREATE A CHANGE IN THE BASIC SITUATION—AND CONQUER THE GAZA STRIP.

Ironically, after trying unsuccessfully to pick a fight, Israel was about to be handed just such an opportunity.

Dear Reader, while we have been focusing on deadly raids and destitute refugees in a sliver of land along the south-easternmost edge of the Mediterranean Sea, overly clever people in London and Paris were hatching a plot that would turn the region upside-down.



BRITISH PRIME MINISTER ANTHONY EDEN

The British and French—for their own reasons—had decided to bring down the Egyptian régime.

FRENCH PRIME MINISTER GUY MOLLET



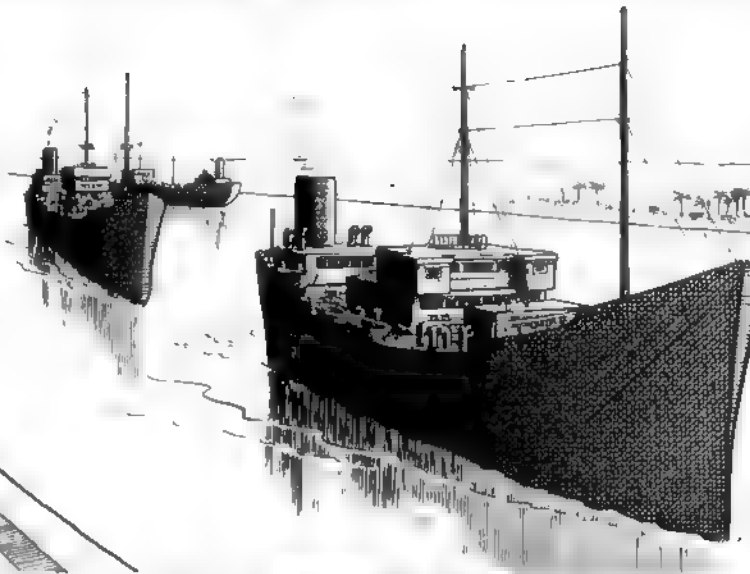
France seethed at Nasser for supporting the costly rebellion against its colonial rule in Algeria.

In fact, by feeding modern weapons to the Israelis, the French hoped to cause problems for Egypt, perhaps even goad Israel into striking Egypt a decisive blow.

Britain marked Nasser for removal because his nationalist, anti-colonialist agenda and pan-Arab alliances could have threatened London's client regime in Iraq and British-controlled oil resources there.



Moreover, after vacating its long-standing Egyptian bases by agreement, Britain was angered when Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, the primary waterway for British oil traffic, in July 1956.

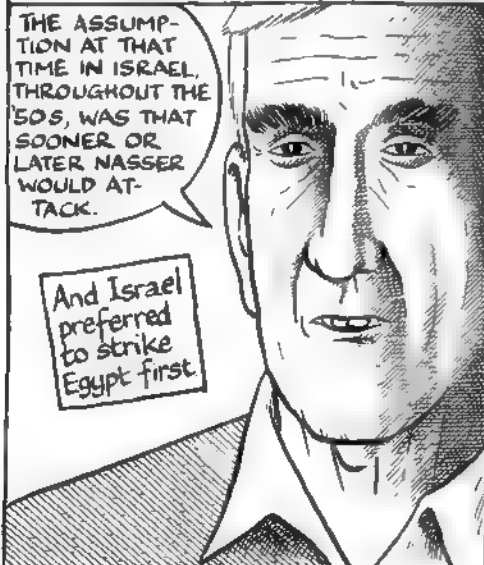


Nasser had taken this dramatic step after London, following Washington's lead, broke its promise to fund Egypt's ambitious Aswan Dam project in retaliation for Cairo's arms deals with the Soviet bloc.

Israel, as we have seen, thought war with Egypt was an inevitability.

THE ASSUMPTION AT THAT TIME IN ISRAEL, THROUGHOUT THE 50s, WAS THAT SOONER OR LATER NASSER WOULD ATTACK.

And Israel preferred to strike Egypt first.

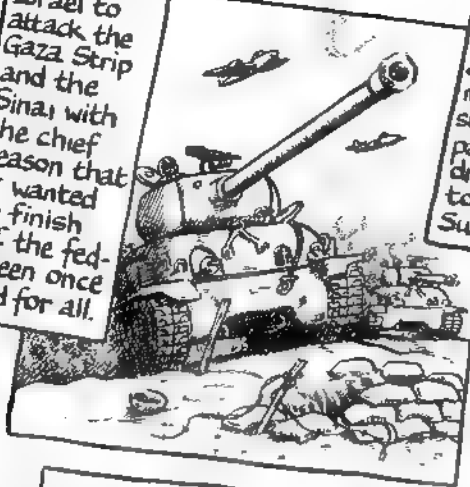


Thus, the interests of Britain, France, and Israel overlapped in Cairo.

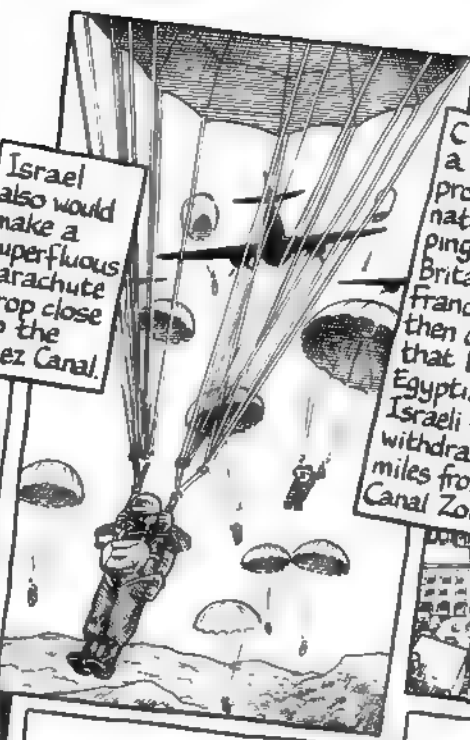
These nations concocted an elaborate deceit to destroy Nasser, which they outlined in a secret protocol signed in Sevres, France—the infamous tripartite collusion.



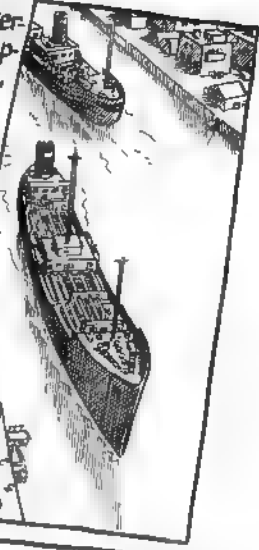
The plot called for Israel to attack the Gaza Strip and the Sinai with the chief reason that it wanted to finish off the fed-ayeen once and for all.



Israel also would make a superfluous parachute drop close to the Suez Canal.



Claiming a duty to protect international shipping traffic, Britain and France would then demand that both Egyptian and Israeli forces withdraw 10 miles from the Canal Zone...



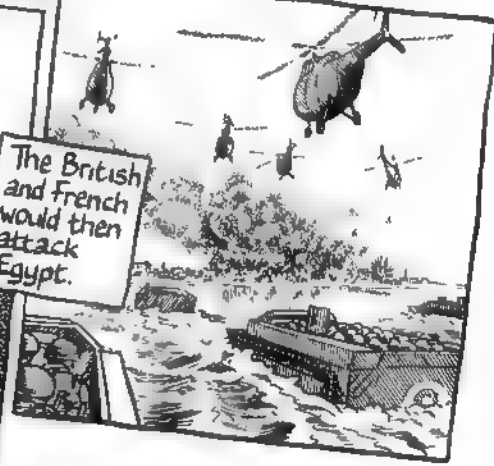
and that Egypt accept the Canal's temporary occupation by an Anglo-French contingent until a settlement could be reached



The Israelis would comply with the ultimatum; Nasser, with Egypt's sovereignty at stake, would certainly refuse it.



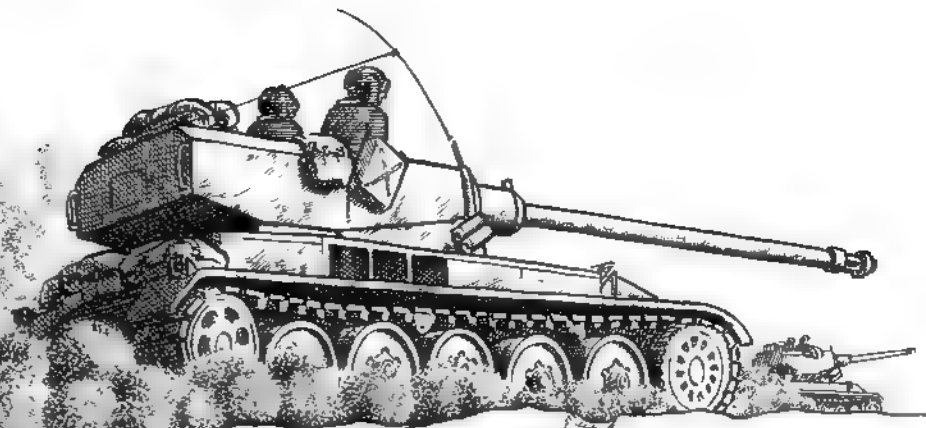
The British and French would then attack Egypt.



The scheme started as planned and then quickly unravelled, but let other histories concern themselves with Washington's diplomatic intervention and the subsequent humiliation of Britain and France.



Israel's assault on Egypt began on October 29, 1956.



On November 2, Israeli forces invaded the Gaza Strip.



ATTACK

Fatima Abu Salem was 19 at the time, a mother of two, and living in Khan Younis.



EL ARISH, EGYPTIAN TOWN IN SINAI ABOUT 80 KM WEST OF RAFAH

"They put out chicken coops and asked people to put food in them. A bad situation. No one had food."



"The army was in a complete state of chaos. Soldiers were running into the brush area, taking off their uniforms."



Her husband, a policeman, joined the rout. "He had a uniform," she says. "He was scared..."

"From ships at sea they started shelling the camps. Airplanes were bombing. So we left at night with our neighbors. Everyone was going."

"We walked down to Rafah through the trees and stayed in a sister's house there"

Saleh Shibliq was a Palestinian in the Egyptian army stationed at an intersection between Khan Younis and Rafah.

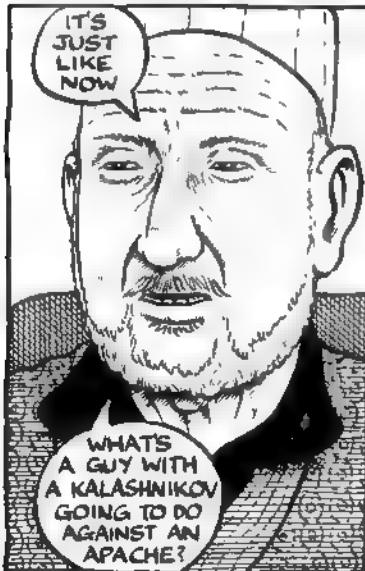
THERE WERE ABOUT 55 OF US.

WITH CARL-GUSTAV RIFLES.

WE HAD MACHINE GUNS AND SOME CANNONS.

WE DIDN'T HAVE TANKS TO DEFEND OURSELVES.

"We couldn't do anything against planes and tanks"



IT'S JUST LIKE NOW

WHAT'S A GUY WITH A KALASHNIKOV GOING TO DO AGAINST AN APACHE?

People started dying. There was an Egyptian officer with three stars who died in front of me named Hanafi. I was the one who covered him with some sand...



"We got orders to withdraw... Everyone went back to his house."



Meanwhile, our old fedayee hurried to Khan Younis with his squad from a mission in Israel to find the defenses already collapsed.



WE RETURNED AND SAW NO PALESTINIAN OR EGYPTIAN FORCES

WE WERE FEW IN NUMBER. A GROUP OF 11..

"The Israelis outnumbered us. They entered with a huge number of tanks."



"I'd be out of my mind to try to defend with a Carl-Gustav."



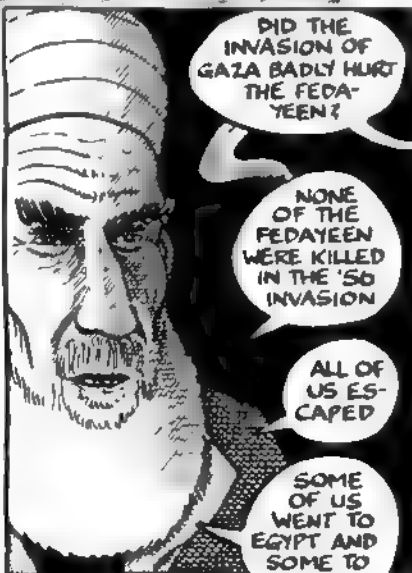
"So we escaped to the sea, and we changed our clothes and moved away"

DID THE INVASION OF GAZA BADLY HURT THE FEDAYEEN?

NONE OF THE FEDAYEEN WERE KILLED IN THE '50 INVASION

ALL OF US ESCAPED

SOME OF US WENT TO EGYPT AND SOME TO JORDAN



"The people who suffered were the young men in our cities"



[THE ISRAELIS] TOOK THEM OUT OF THEIR HOUSES AND LINED THEM AGAINST THE WALL AND SHOT THEM

NOV. 3, 1956

PT. 1: KHAN YOUNIS TOWN CENTER

We last left Saleh Shibliq fleeing the battle-field.

He found his family and other relatives at the home of his uncle in the middle of Khan Yonis

I WANTED TO LEAVE THE AREA BECAUSE IT WAS CENTRAL BUT MY RELATIVES SAID—

STAY HERE!

WE'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR YOU

The next morning, Saleh could see Israeli soldiers in the street.

Despite this, one of his cousins decided to leave for his own home

NO LOOK, THERE ARE JEWS AT THE INTERSECTION THERE.

NO, THEY'RE NOT JEWS

TAKE IT FROM ME, THEY'RE JEWS.

"He walked toward them, about 100 meters, and they told him to lift his hands..."

"and they took him away."

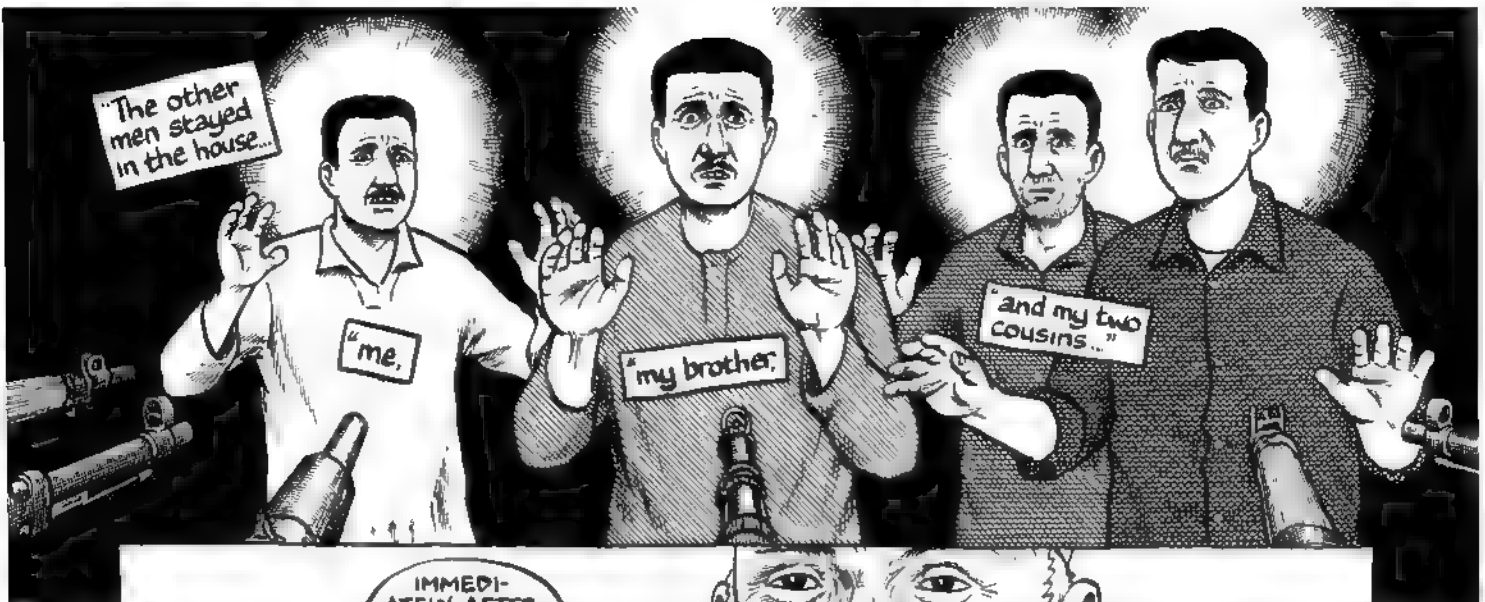


"I had taken off my uniform, but my weapon was with me. I thought I'd take some shots at them, but my father said,

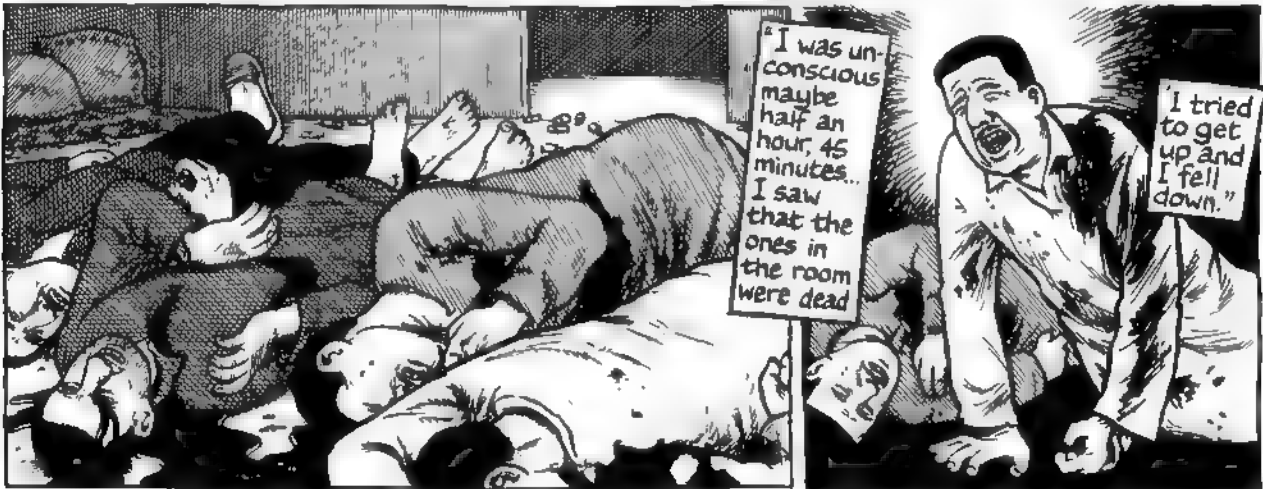


"They came to where we were... (By this time I had hidden my rifle and some grenades I had under a bed)





IMMEDIATELY AFTER WE RAISED OUR ARMS, THEY SPRAYED US WITH GUN-FIRE.



Saleh was wounded in three places. One bullet shattered his forearm.



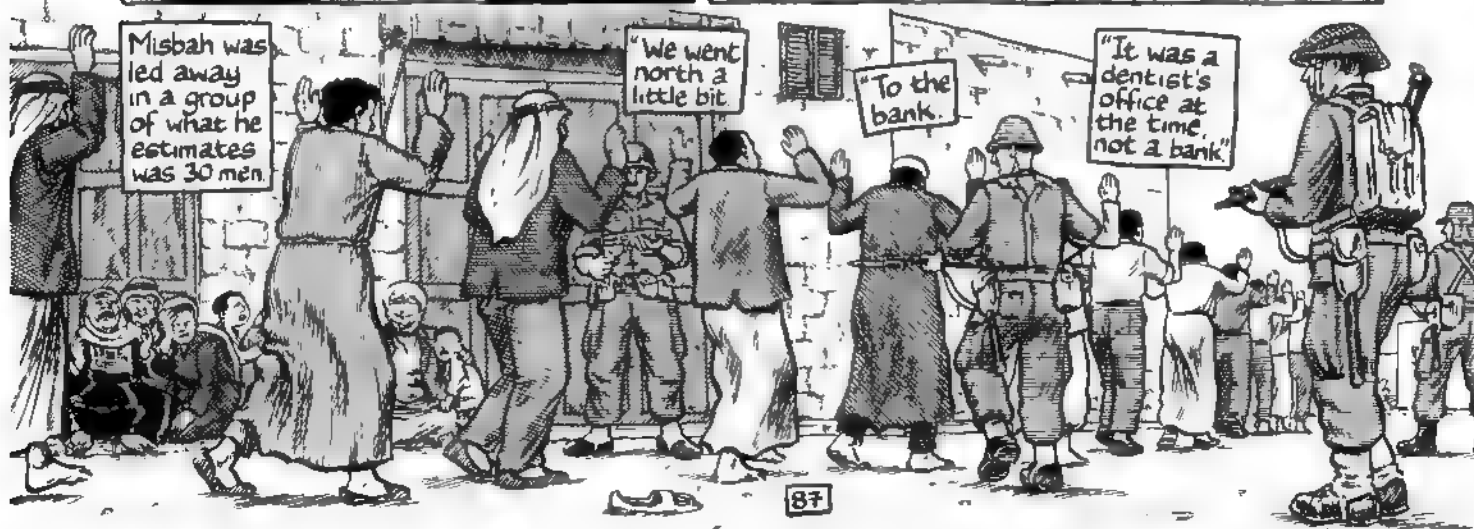
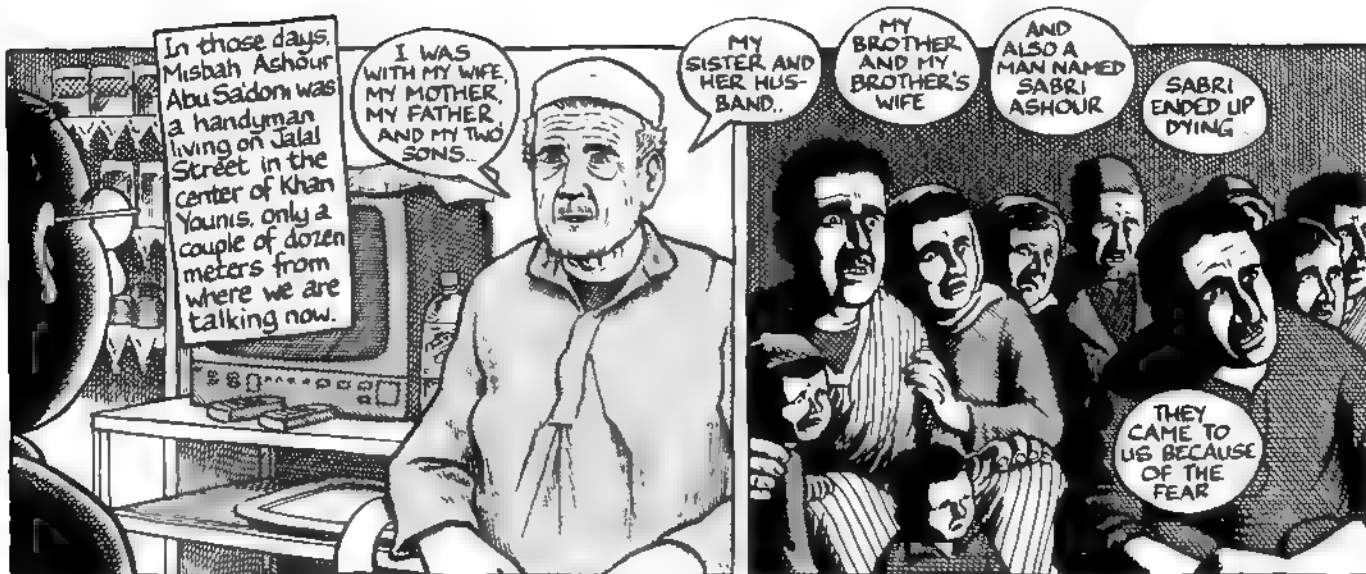
The women of the household carried him to the local clinic the day after the shooting.

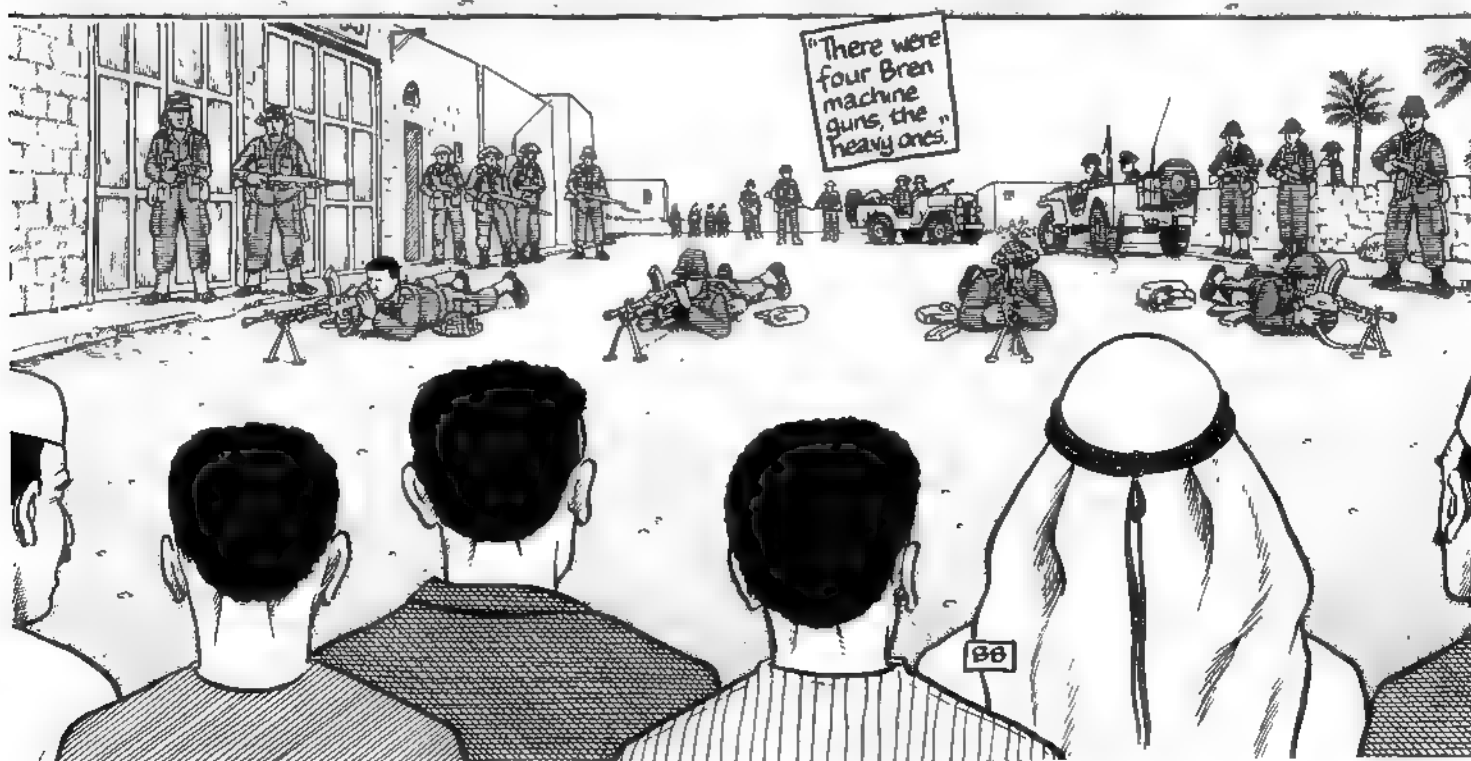


From there the Red Cross took him to a hospital in Gaza City.

The cousin who had left the house earlier and been taken by the Israelis was found dead near the Khan Younis castle, one of the town's landmarks.









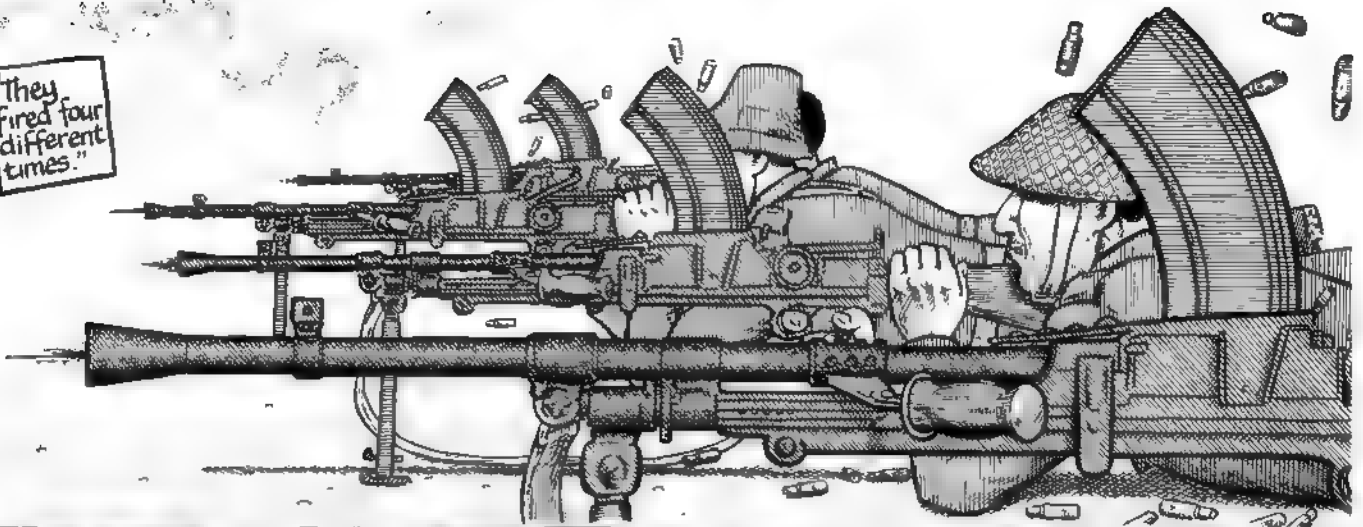
"I didn't think he had fired at all, but after seven years I discovered a bullet from a Beretta in my leg..."



"I sort of went off to the side. I was thinking of escaping."



"They fired four different times."



THERE WERE MEN WHO HAD BEEN SHOT IN THE FACE AND THEIR SKULLS HAD OPENED UP BECAUSE YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT FOUR TIMES

THEY WERE HEAVY BULLETS



"I was reciting the Koran..."

"and my spirit went all the way up to the sky."

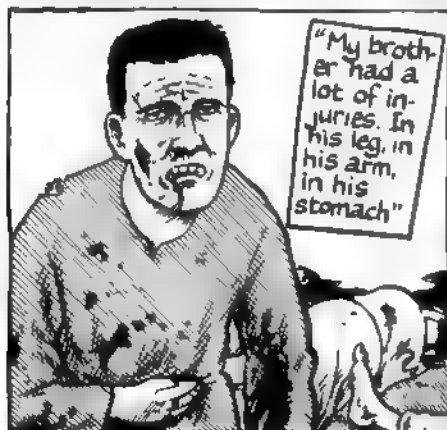
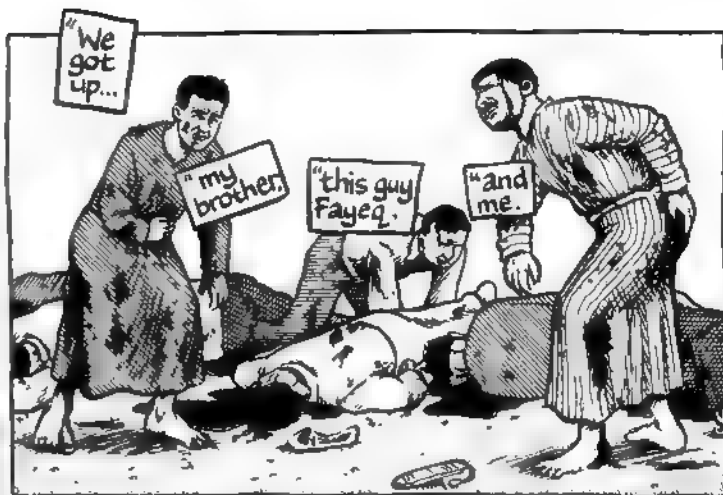


"During the fourth burst I felt as though something weighing 50 kilos had been thrown from the top of a minaret on to my back"

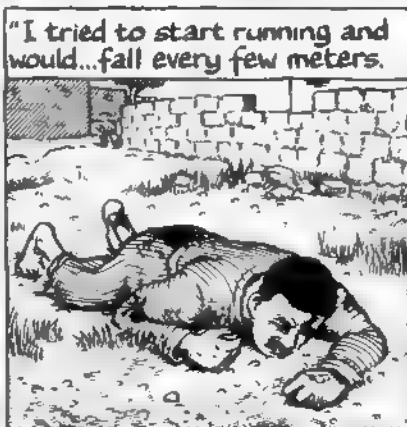


A bullet had entered Misbah's buttock and exited at his tailbone. He also was wounded in his head and his heel.



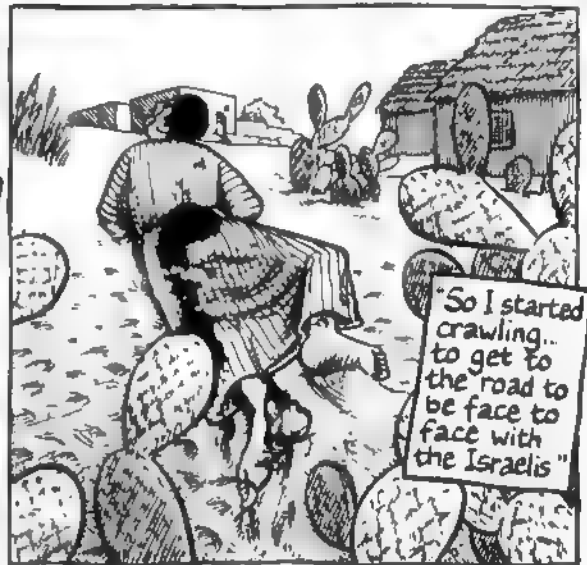


The brothers fled the area and hid in a hole in the ground, but they could see Israeli soldiers nearby.





Misbah made his way to the entrance of the refugee camp where he hid among cactus plants until he could bear his pain no longer.



Instead, Misbah was found by women who had ventured forth to find their male relatives...



and soon he was discovered by his own family...



who tried tending to his injuries the best they could.



Takreem El-Batta, who resided on the same street as Misbah, was a young boy at the time

WE WERE LIVING IN THE HOUSE BELOW THIS ONE.

MY MOTHER, MY FATHER, FIVE SISTERS, FOUR BROTHERS, AND THE WIFE OF ONE OF MY BROTHERS

AND SHE HAD TWO CHILDREN

"We heard on Israeli radio to stay in our houses and nothing would happen to us."

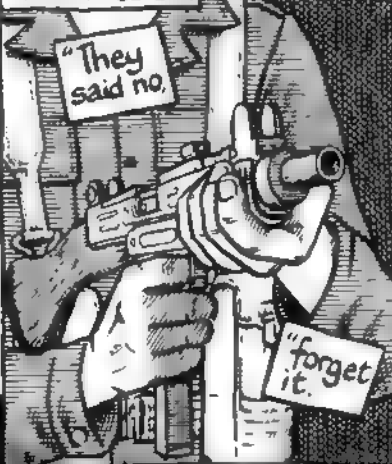


"Khan Younis was the last place that fell to the Israelis."

"On the 3rd of November, 1956.. they came and banged on the door, and my father, who was a sheik, came down and opened it..."



"He asked ...if he could wear his [sheik's] clothes...and put his headdress on."



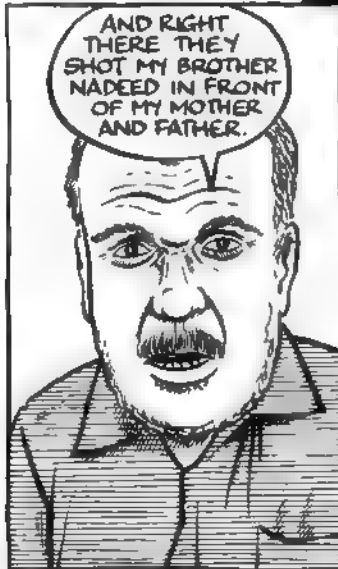
"They said no."

"forget it."

"They said everyone had to come down"



AND RIGHT THERE THEY SHOT MY BROTHER NADEED IN FRONT OF MY MOTHER AND FATHER.

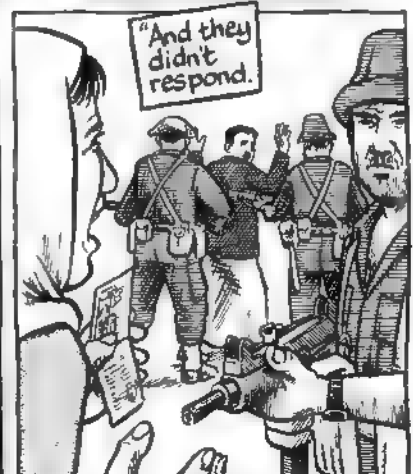


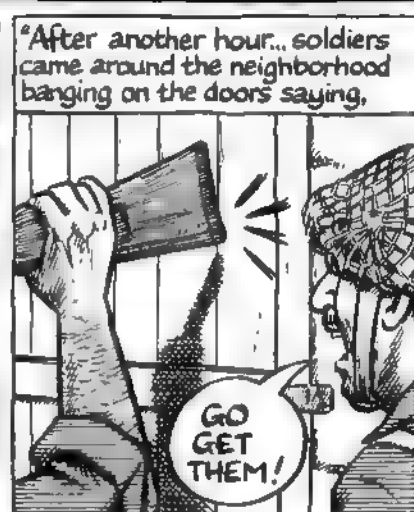
"He was 20 years old."



"He was a student at Al-Azhar University in Egypt, which is a religious school."

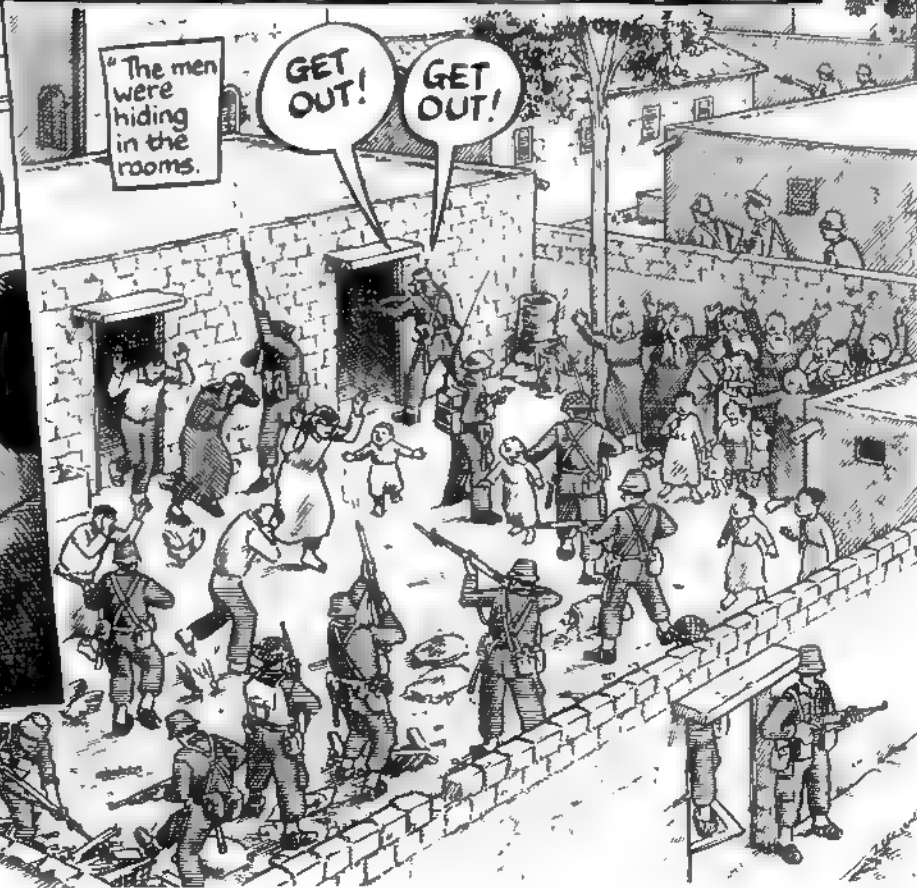
"He was on vacation."

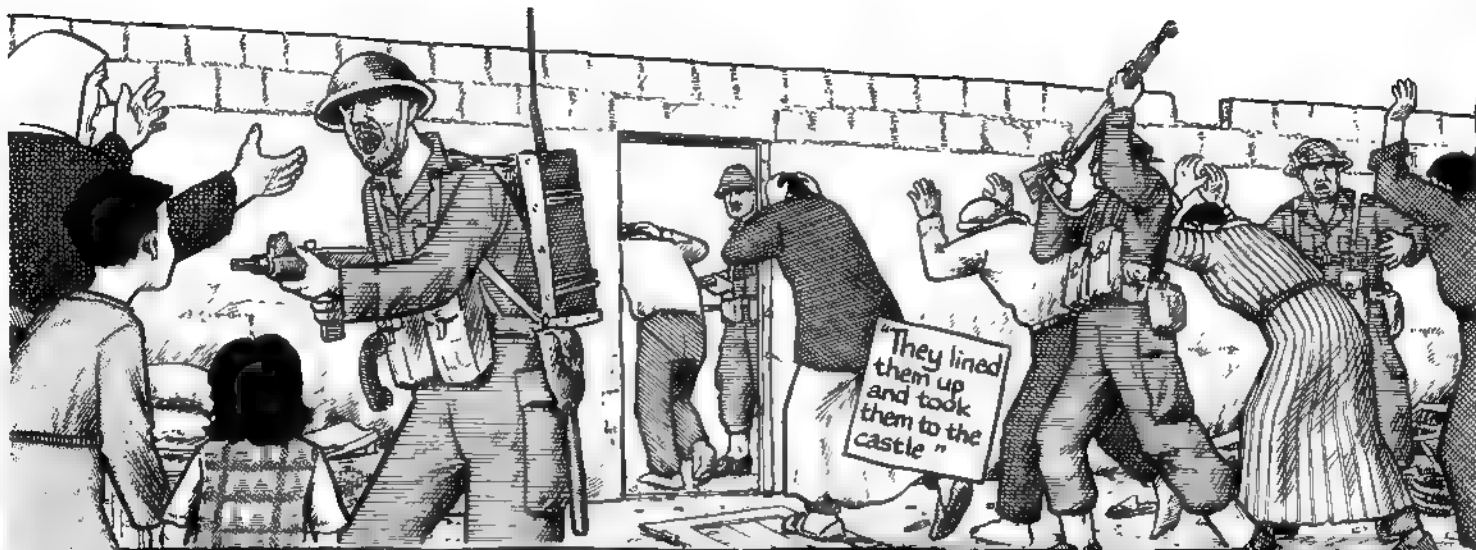






Faris Barbakh, 14 years old at the time, was living near Khan Younis' Mamluk castle.





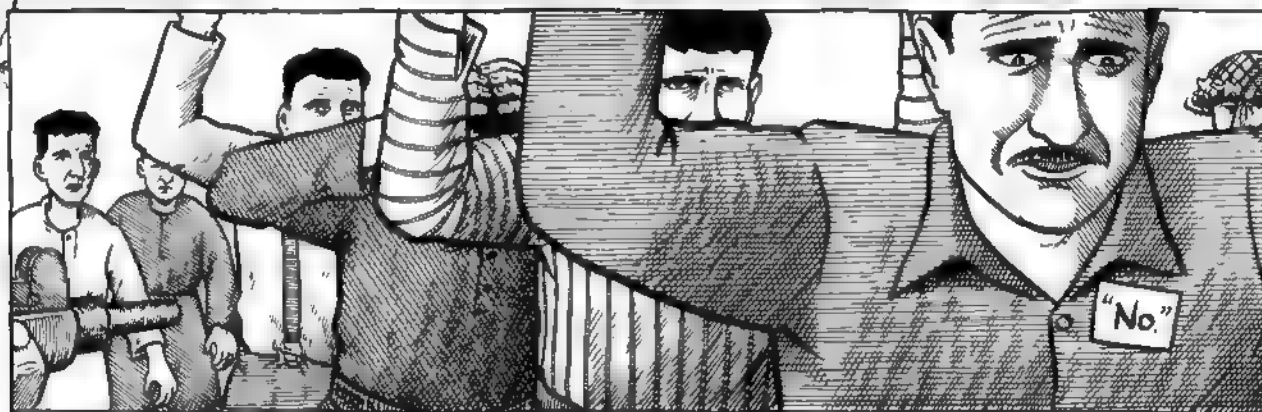
Faris and another boy ran after the young men and their captors



DIDN'T SOMEONE HOLD YOU BACK? DIDN'T ONE OF THE WOMEN SAY 'DON'T GO'?

WE WERE CHILDREN AT THE TIME, AND WE JUST RAN

WERE THE MEN SAYING ANYTHING?



[THE SOLDIERS] TOLD ME TO GO BACK. I'D MOVE AWAY AND COME BACK AGAIN.

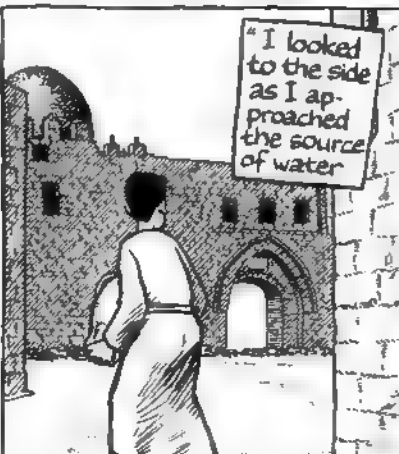
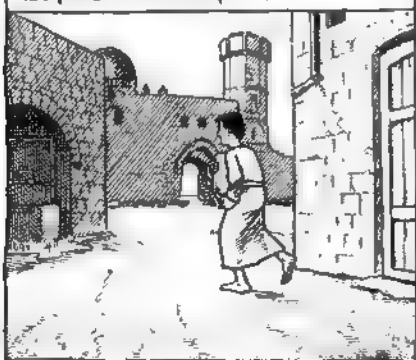


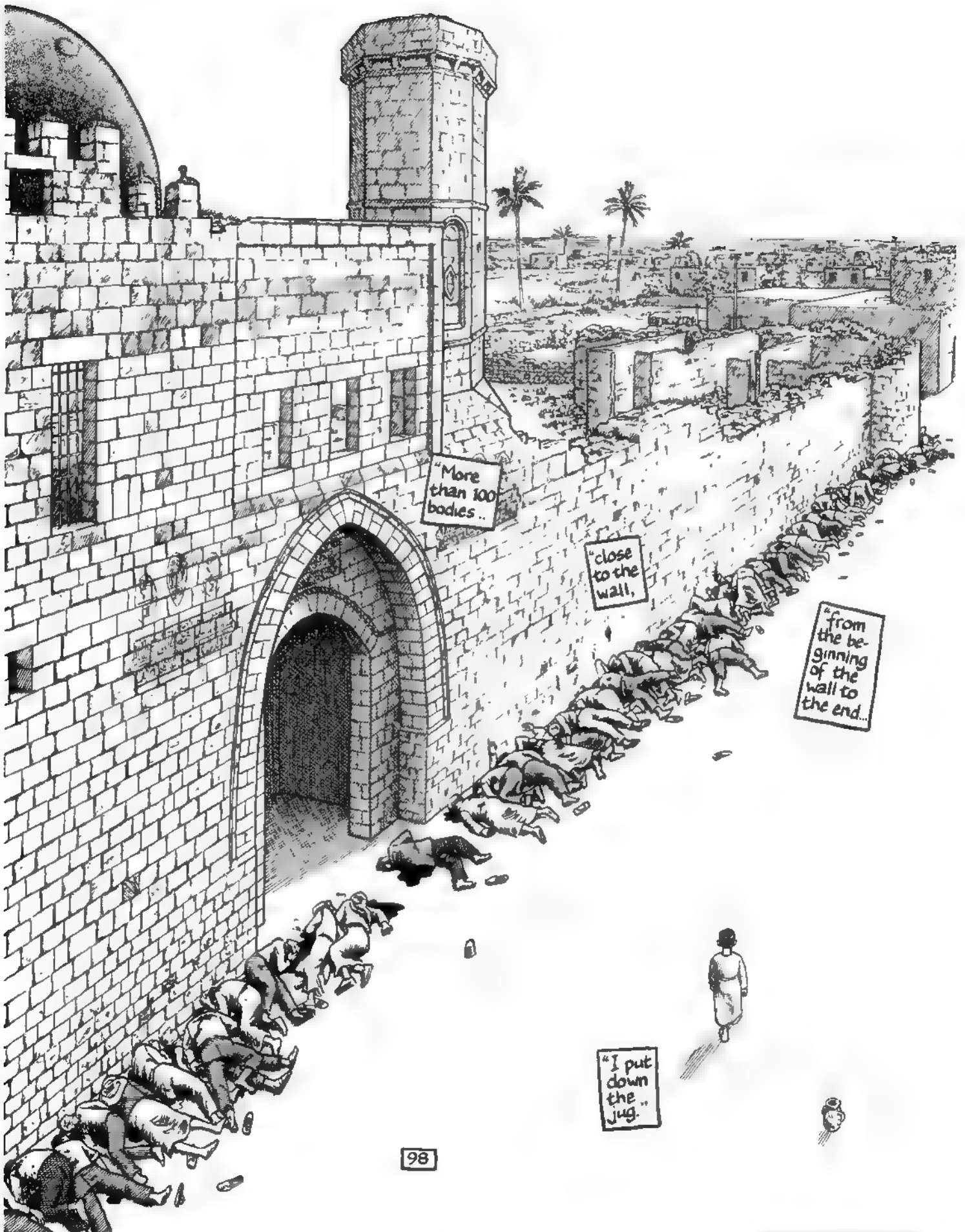
THEY TOOK THE YOUTHS NEAR THE CASTLE.

I DIDN'T REACH THE CASTLE

I RETURNED HOME.

Half an hour to 45 minutes later, Faris was sent to fetch water despite the curfew.



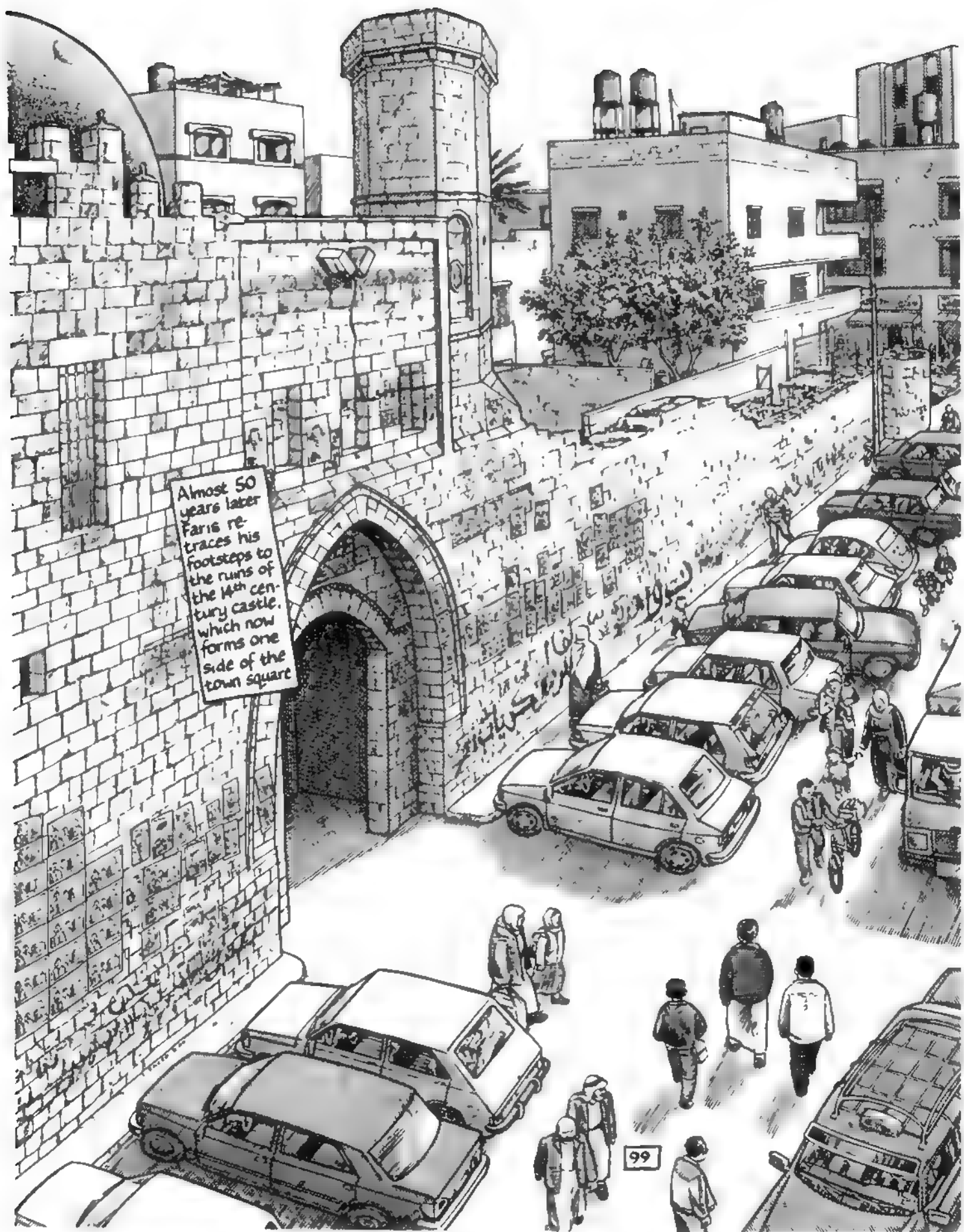


"More
than 100
bodies..."

"close
to the
wall,"

"from
the be-
ginning
of the
wall to
the end..."

"I put
down
the
jug."



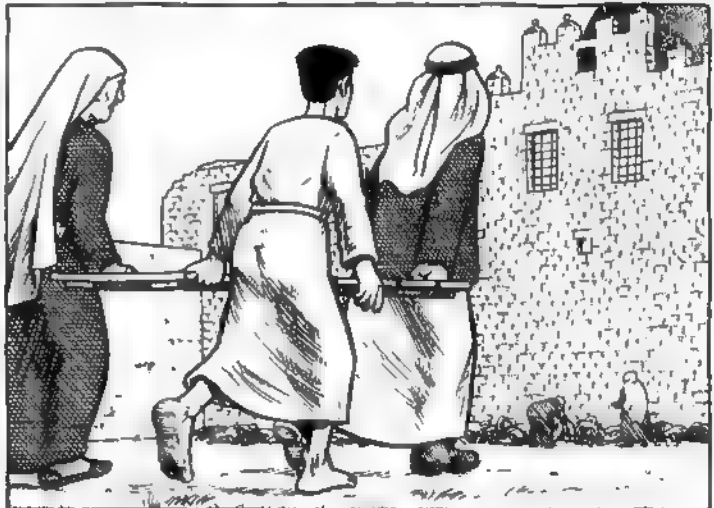
Almost 50 years later Faris re-traces his footsteps to the ruins of the 14th century castle, which now forms one side of the town square



"I went to the house of one of my relatives, El-Hajj Abdullah. His house was very close to the area."



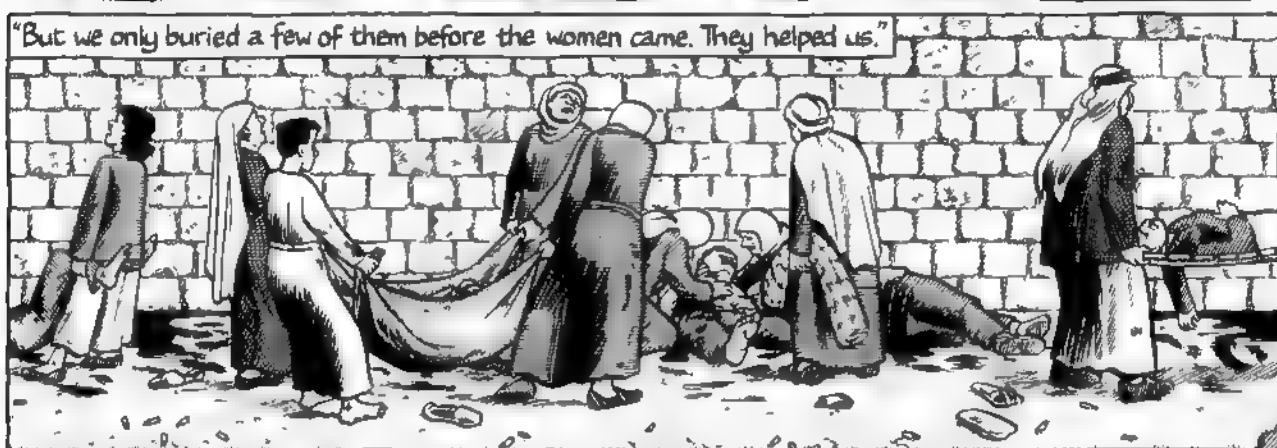
"The old man asked his wife to bring a pallet."





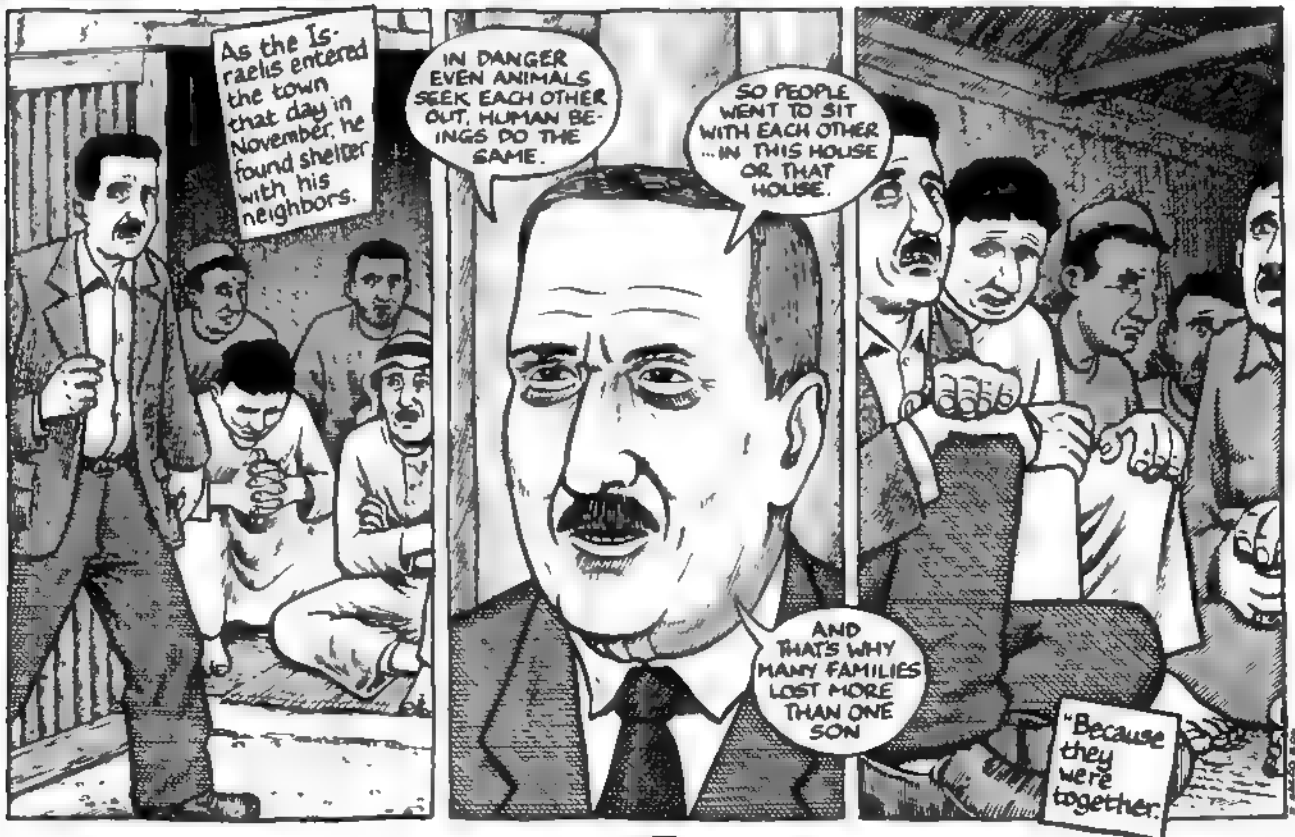
"At that time there were hundreds of bodies in one area. You can't bury them individually. You have to hurry and bury the bodies."

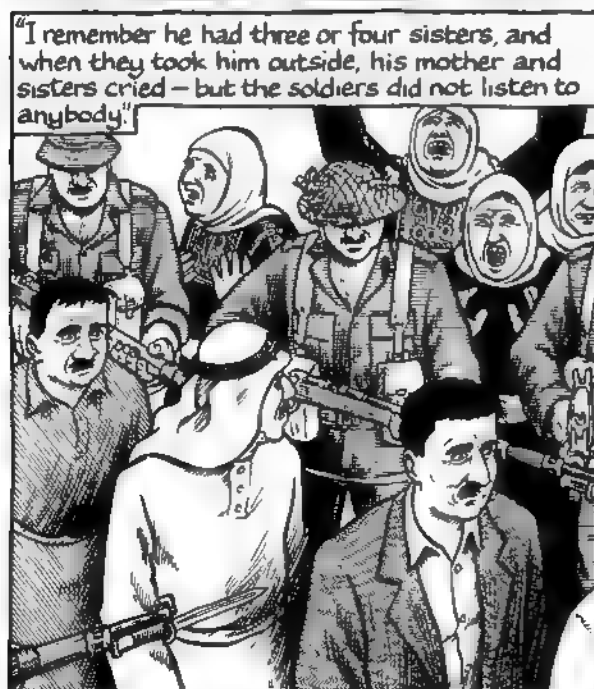


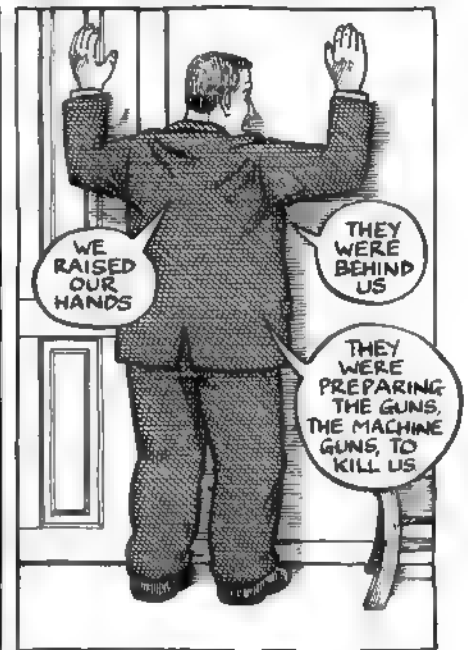
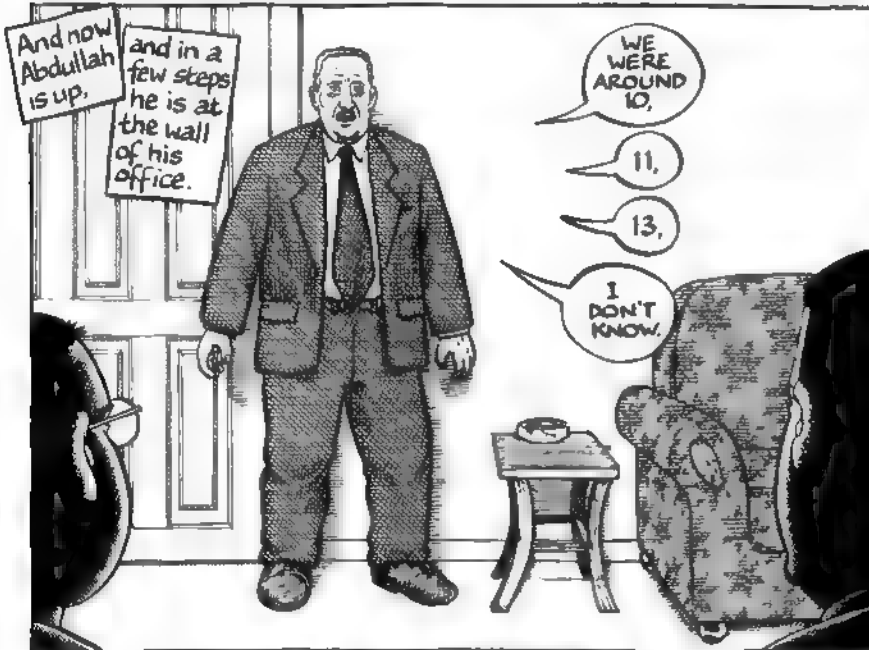
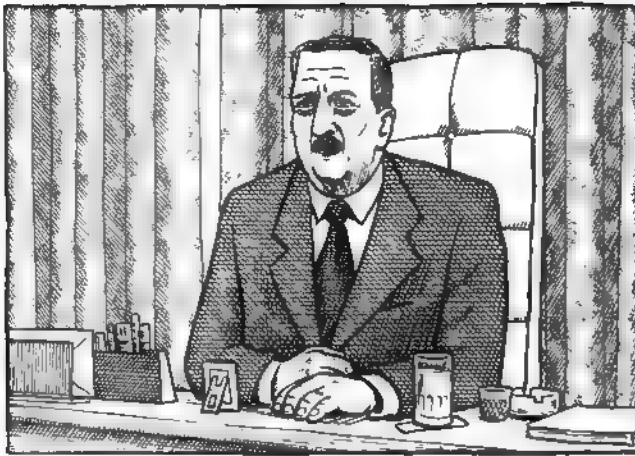


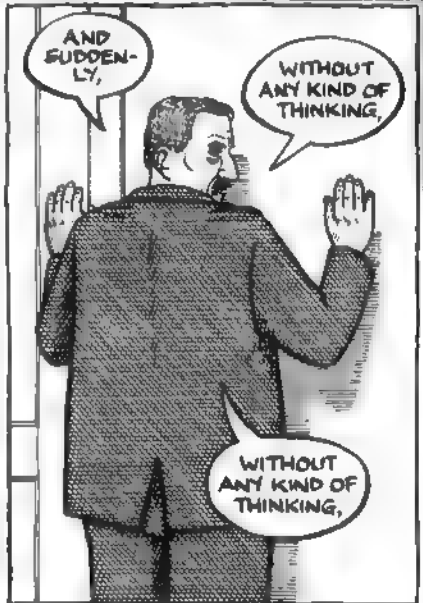
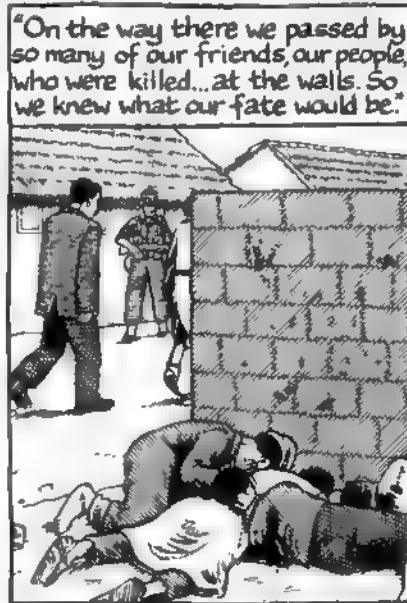
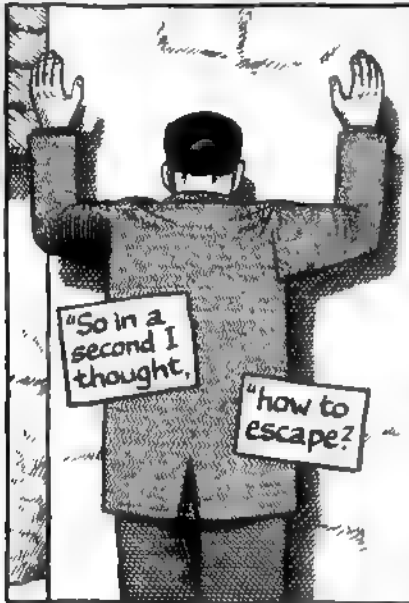
NOV. 3, 1956

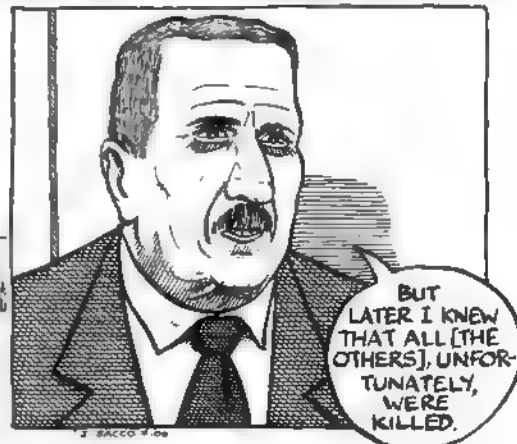
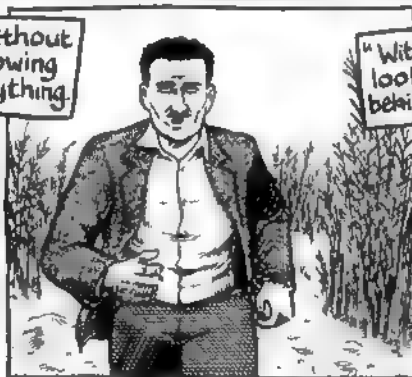
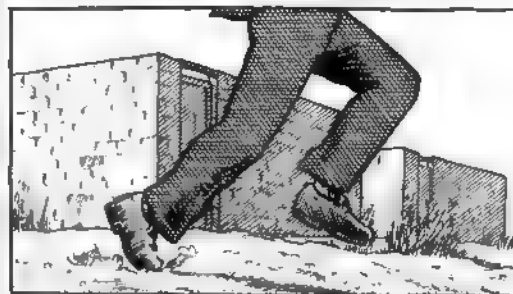
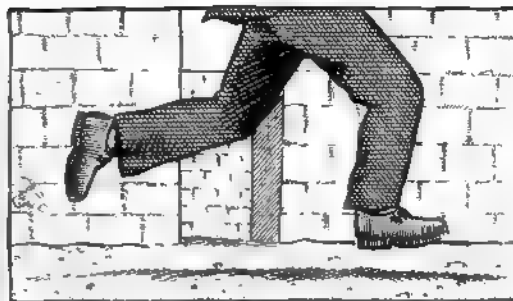
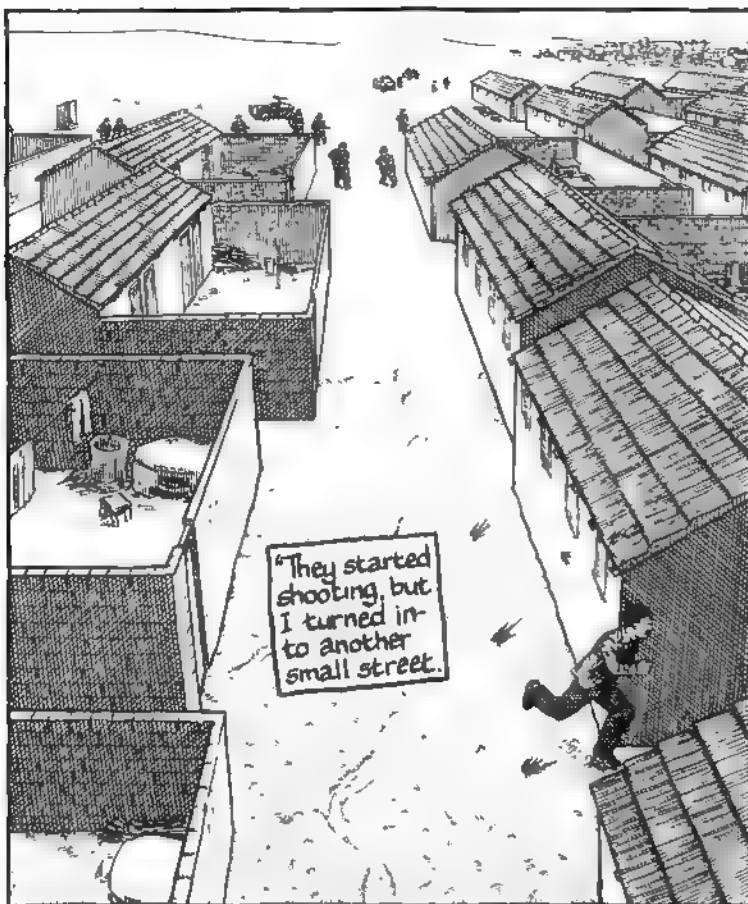
PT. 2: KHAN YOUNIS REFUGEE CAMP

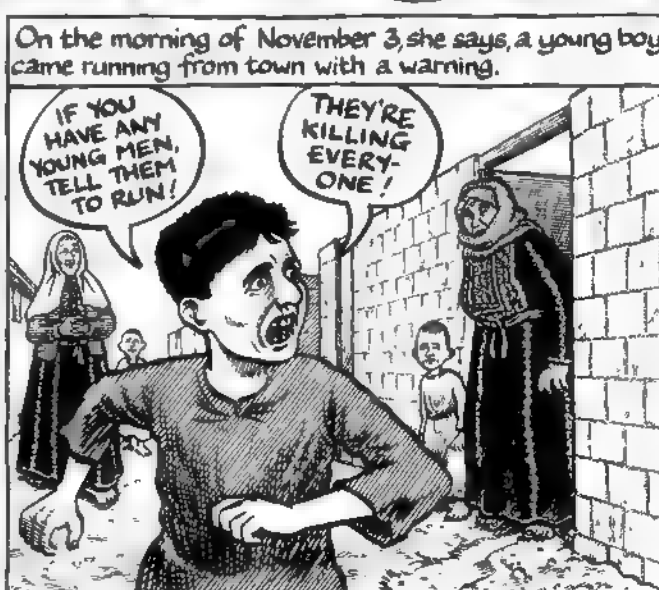
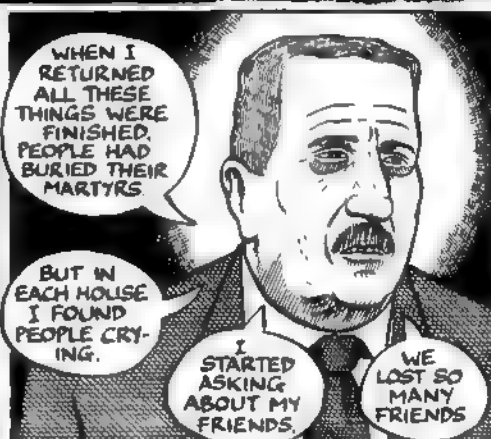












But Abdullah and three of his brothers were still in the camp, huddled with their families, when the Israelis arrived.



"The first brother who came out was Ibrahim."



"They killed him"



"The next was Subhi. Subhi held a child in his arms."



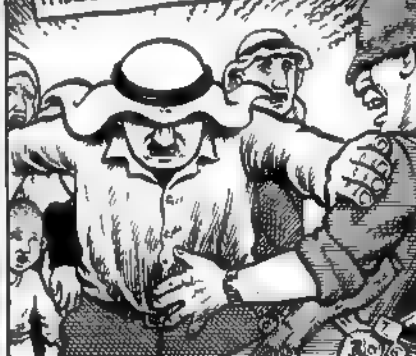
"They shot Subhi, and as he [fell] they shot the boy, too."



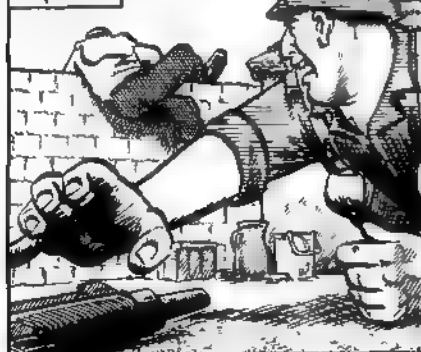
"Then came Abdullah and Khamis. I called:"



At that point, Khamis made a run for it.



"He jumped over the wall and escaped."



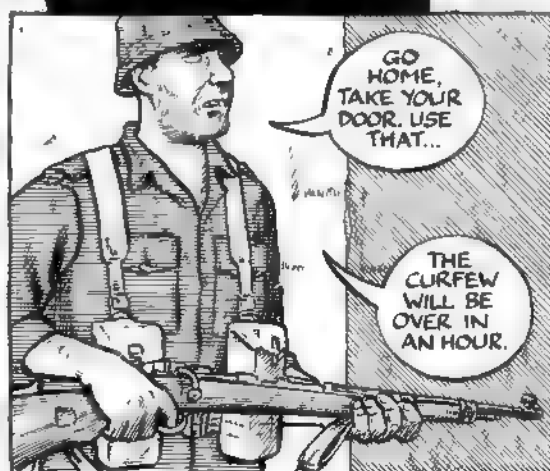
"Abdullah...was trying to escape, but they caught him."



"They took him outside the door...and they shot him in his side."



* THE INJURED BOY, A NEPHEW OF THE BROTHERS, WOULD LOSE HIS LEG.





MEMORY AND THE ESSENTIAL TRUTH

You have just finished reading a string of personal recollections that tell the story of the widespread killings of Palestinian men by Israeli soldiers in Khan Younis on November 3, 1956



Based on the testimony, the men were shot in their homes or lined up and shot in the streets and against walls.



Now allow me to kick at the pillars upon which our story stands.

I don't need to tell you, memories change with the years, and the memories we have excavated here are decades old

Memory blurs edges; it adds and subtracts

Let us take one example, the story of Omm Nafez.

Her story is well known among the camp old-timers because it is particularly tragic.

Four brothers were taken outside to be shot.



Her husband was among them, and he was killed.



One of the brothers, Khamis, escaped.





Khamis is still alive.

His recollections are interesting for the sake of comparison.

For instance, he says he and his brothers were lined up by soldiers before being shot rather than shot one-by-one as they came through the door, as Omm Nafez remembers.



In a separate interview, another witness, Khamis's nephew, Abu Antar El-Sa'doni, who was seven at the time, agrees that the brothers were lined up.*



In fact, Abu Antar's account concurs with Khamis's about the order in which the men stood against the wall - with Khamis nearest the door.



Now let's take up Khamis's story

He describes how he ran as his brothers were being shot...



how he knocked down the soldier pursuing him...



how he jumped over a wall...



and how he fled as soldiers fired at him.



Abu Antar confirms this version so far, down to Khamis's exhortation to Subhi to flee:

AND HE SAID, 'FOLLOW ME, SUBHI!'



* ABU ANTAR'S FATHER, THE FIFTH BROTHER, WAS AWAY IN EGYPT AT THE TIME.



Khamis says he hid in the brush outside the camp until 9 o'clock, and then—

"I began to make my way between the houses back to my house"



He tells the story of his brother Subhi's agonizingly slow death.

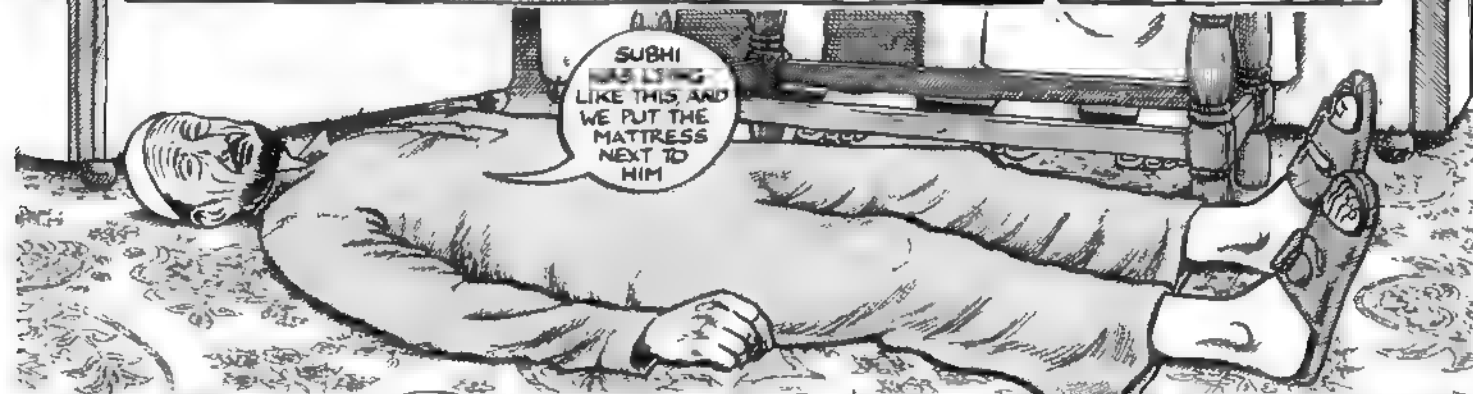
SUBHI SAID—

TAKE ME TO THE CLINIC

I'M FINISHED

I'M GOING TO DIE

"I ripped down a zinc door and I put a mattress on it."



SUBHI WAS LYING LIKE THIS AND WE PUT THE MATTRESS NEXT TO HIM



HE WANTED TO MOVE HIMSELF TO THE MATTRESS

AND HE BROUGHT HIMSELF UP LIKE THIS



HE STARTED GURGLING

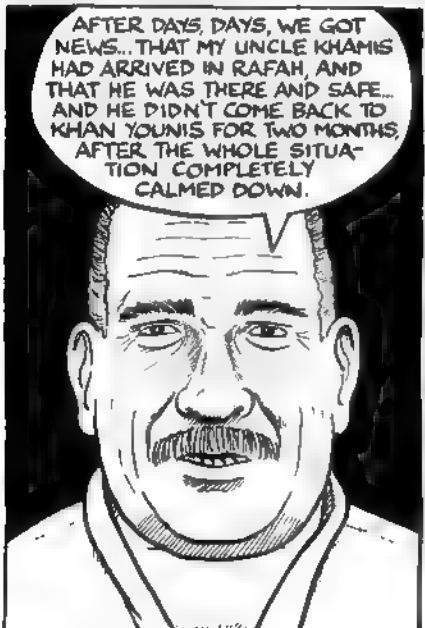
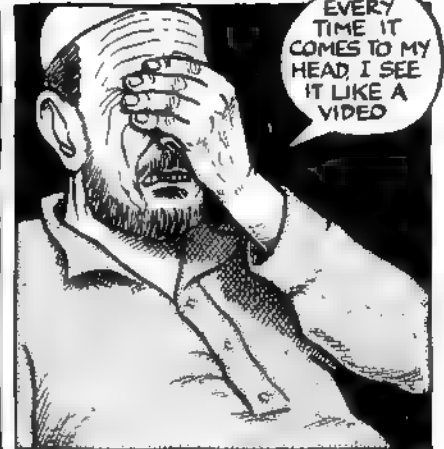
HE HAD BULLET WOUNDS IN HIS STOMACH



HE GOT WEAK AND SAID—

I CAN'T

Next, Khamis says, Subhi motioned to his family.



Is it my place to say that Khamis, who told his story so affectingly before a rapt group of his relatives and neighbors, was not there?

Perhaps Omm Nafez, who was so distraught at her husband's death, has blocked out her memory of Khamis;

perhaps Abu Antar was too young and simply doesn't remember him present.

Or perhaps Khamis has heard the story of his brother's death so often that it has become his own. Maybe Khamis feels he should have been with Subhi.

Khamis survived.

Three of his brothers died, leaving widows and five children.

And that is not all.

In the immediate area 36 people from nine houses, his neighbors and friends, were killed, he says.

OMER EL-HALI

In moments of calm, he says, he can remember the names of all the dead.

MED ABU AMER

HAMID ABDEL HAFEZ EL-RANTSI

ABDEL AZIZ NOFAL

AHMED EL-ZAKKI

I cannot untangle the twining guilt and grief that envelope a person who survives what so many others did not; nor can I explain what might induce a traumatized individual to recall a brother's death if he was not there - assuming he was not.

I only want to acknowledge the problems that go along with relying on eyewitness testimony in telling our story

But all this should not let us forget the essential truth:

Khamis's three brothers were shot by Israeli soldiers on November 3, 1956.

They were among what a U.N. report alleges were 275 Palestinians killed in Khan Yunis town and camp that day

116

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of the Gaza Strip by the
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populati and caused
fugees, p

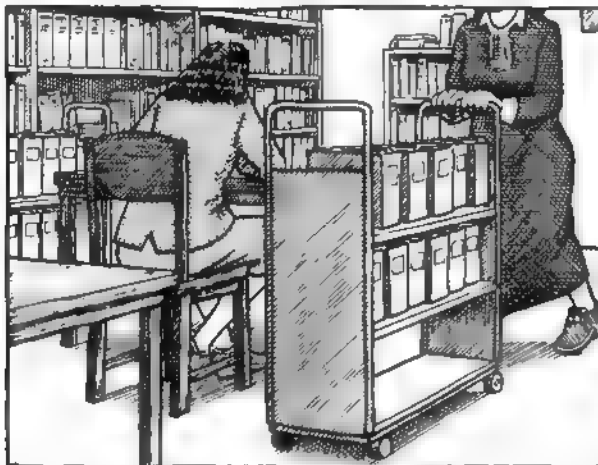
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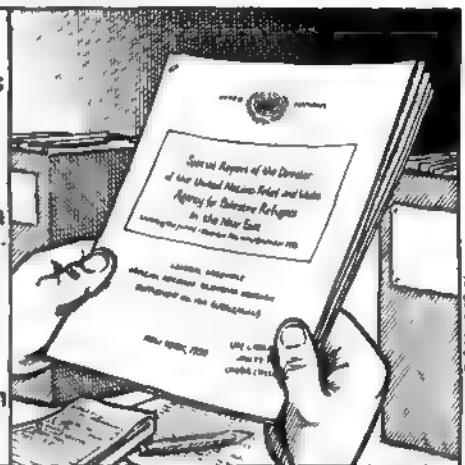
DOCUMENT

casualties. The Israeli authorities state that there was resistance to their occupation and that the Palestinian refugees formed part of the resistance. On the other hand, the refugees state that all resistance had ceased at the time of the incident and that many unarmed civilians were killed as the Israeli troops went through the town and camp, seeking men in possession of arms. The exact number of dead and wounded is not known, but the Director has received from the various sources trustworthy lists of names of those killed on 3 November, number 117, of whom 140 were refugees and 135 local residents.

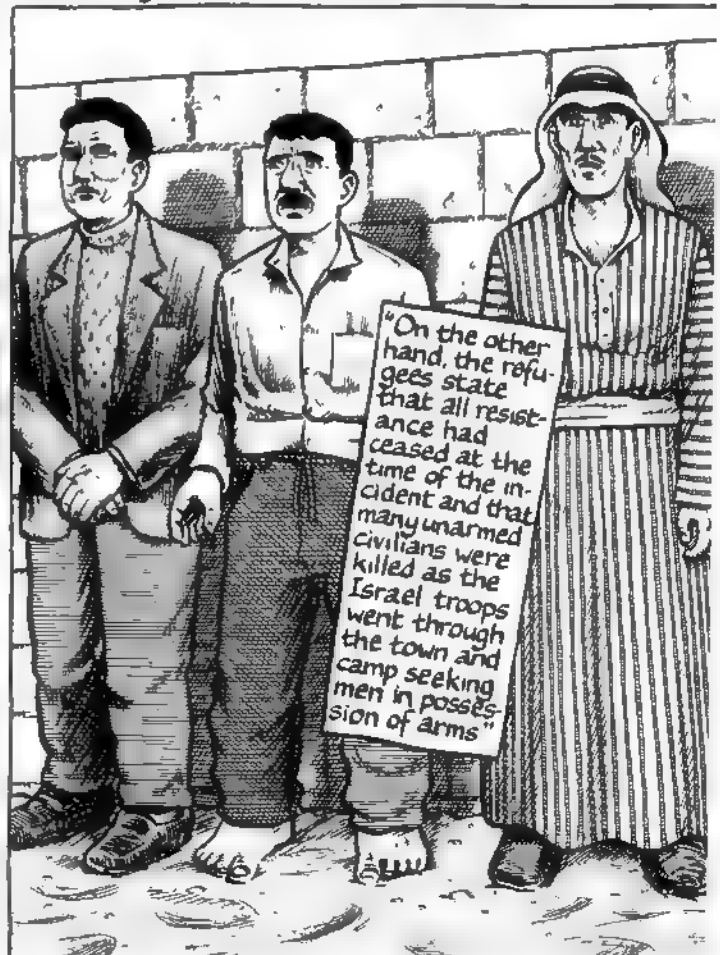
It is the 'Special Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East' covering the period 1 November 1956 to mid-December 1956, to the General Assembly.



To the historian, who rubs his hands together as the archivist wheels out a cart loaded with forgotten files, a contemporary document like this can represent a more definitive version of events than decades-old memories.



But the report indicates 'there is some conflict in the accounts given as to the causes of the casualties.



The U.N. report presents two incompatible versions of the Khan Younis "incident," and so in this case, as in many others, history-by-document drops us into a muddled soup of "on the one hand" and "possibles" seasoned, perhaps, with a few "probables."



But clearly the refugees' claim in the U.N. report dovetails with the eyewitness testimony Abed and I gathered many years later. Namely: the fighting had stopped; the men were unarmed; they did not resist.

One former Israeli soldier present in Khan Younis in 1956, journalist Marek Gefen, came forward in 1982 to write about his experiences there.

Gefen reported that when he entered the town he found the streets "completely empty."

"In a few alleyways we found bodies strewn on the ground, covered in blood, their heads shattered. No one had taken care of moving them."



"I felt dreadful. I stopped at a corner and threw up. I couldn't get used to the sight of a human slaughterhouse."



"The cleansing of the Strip went on," he wrote, and described a fellow soldier killing an unarmed Arab doctor in an UNRWA clinic during a search for weapons.



Gefen has passed away, but I manage to locate one of his army comrades in Tel Aviv. Naftali Carni was in the same unit as Gefen.



He remembers some minor abuses of the Palestinian population by soldiers, but says he recalls nothing like the bodies Gefen saw in Khan Younis.

In fact, Carni doubts Gefen's story. He thinks Gefen was prone to sensationalism. "He was a newspaperman," he says by way of explanation.



Well, I'm a newspaperman at heart, and to me it's never been a term of disparagement.

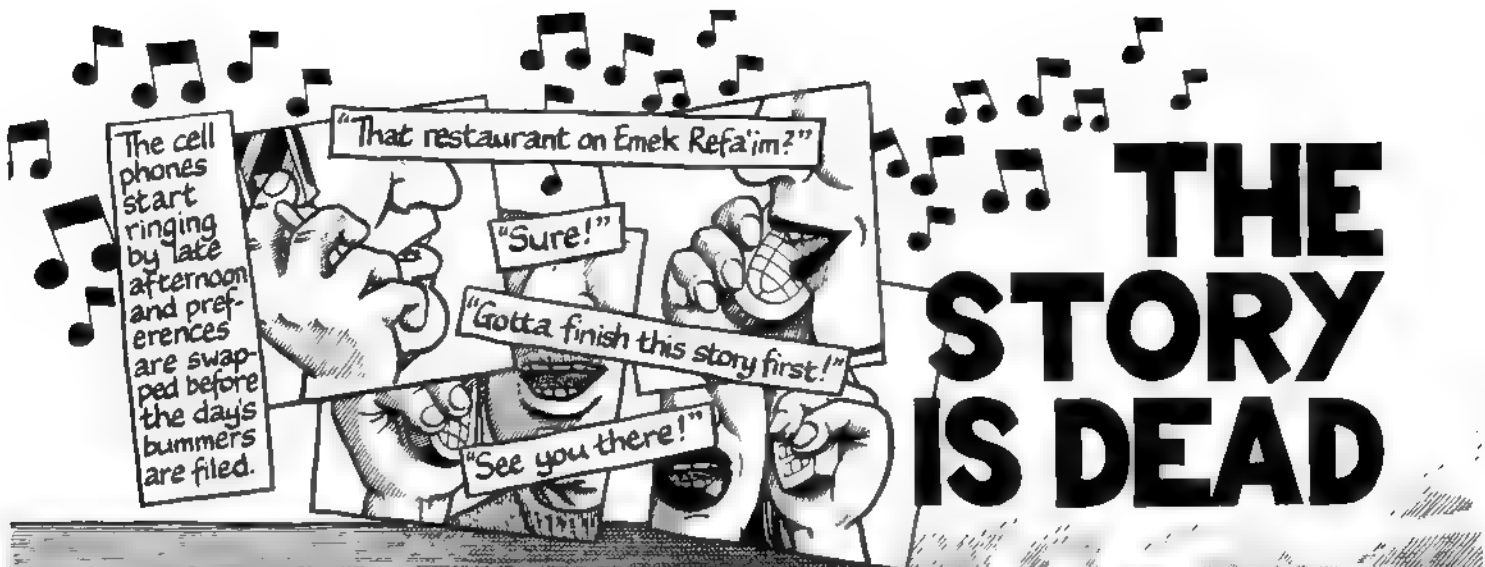
A newspaperman wants the facts, the definitive version, not a bunch of "on the other hands" and "possibilities" or even "probables."

And I swear I'll wrench nothing but the facts from our next batch of eyewitnesses, frail and imperfect as they might be.

We have one more footnote to go.

FEAST





They light their smokes.

They sip their drinks.

"There are no good stories," says Barbara, who wonders why she is still here.

The story is dead!

Ahhh...but there's another story!

The mother of all imminent epics!

A once-in-a-journalistic-generation extravaganza with oodles more potential than our dried up old beat!

Or so my esteemed colleagues believe.

IRAQ?

THEY AIN'T THAT STUPID!

WON'T HAPPEN!

But Barbara says she'll get there through Kuwait, and Harvey plans to slip in via Iran. Meanwhile, Christine's already done a chemical warfare course hoping she'll be tapped to go, too.

Long live the story!

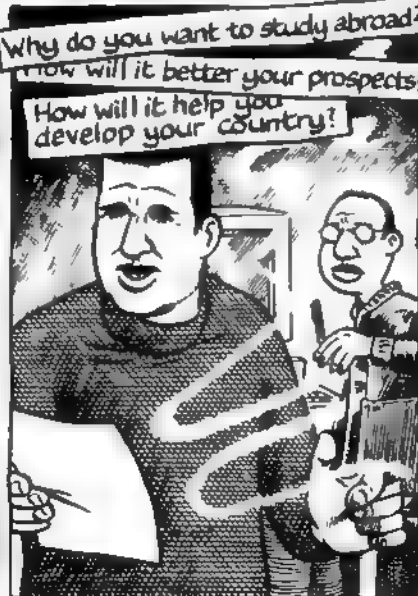
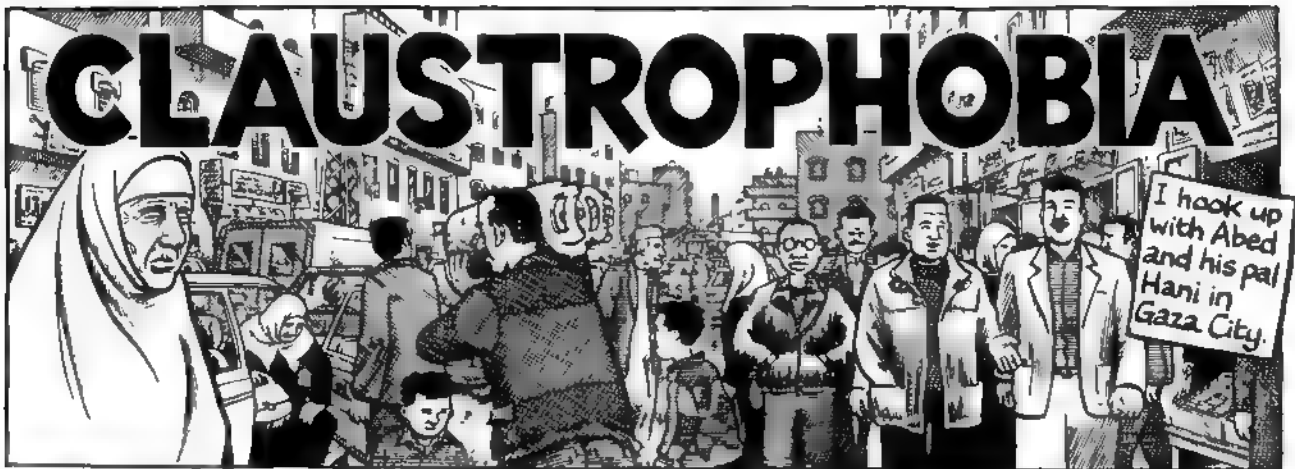
But I'm playing it safe.

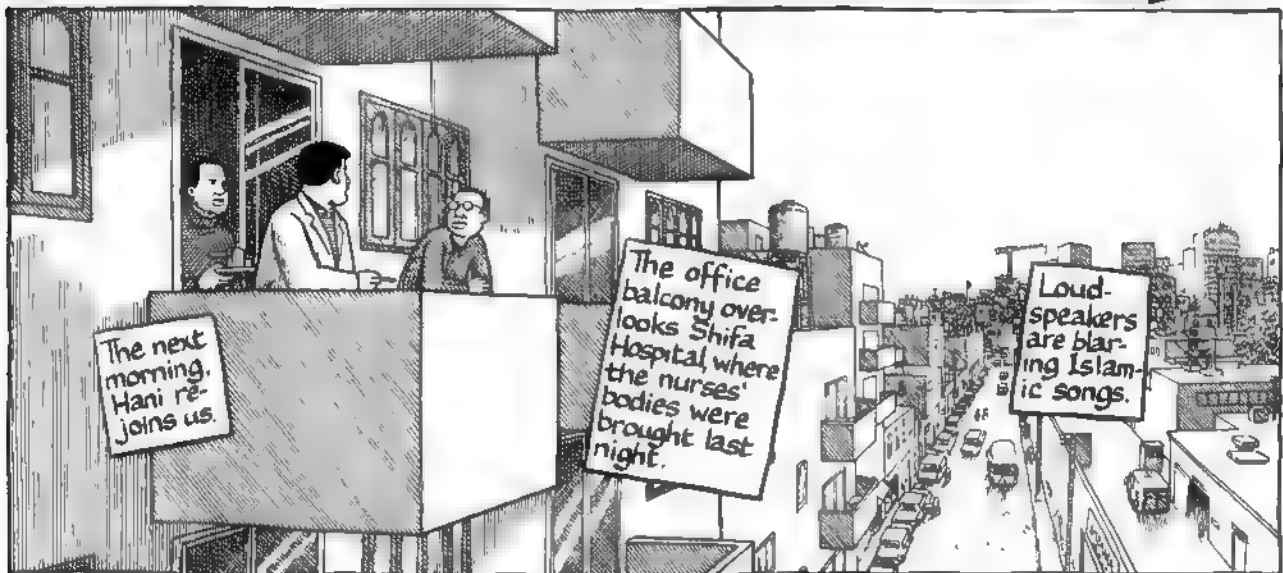
I'm heading to the Gaza Strip for a 50-year-old story.

Because old stories are always good ones.

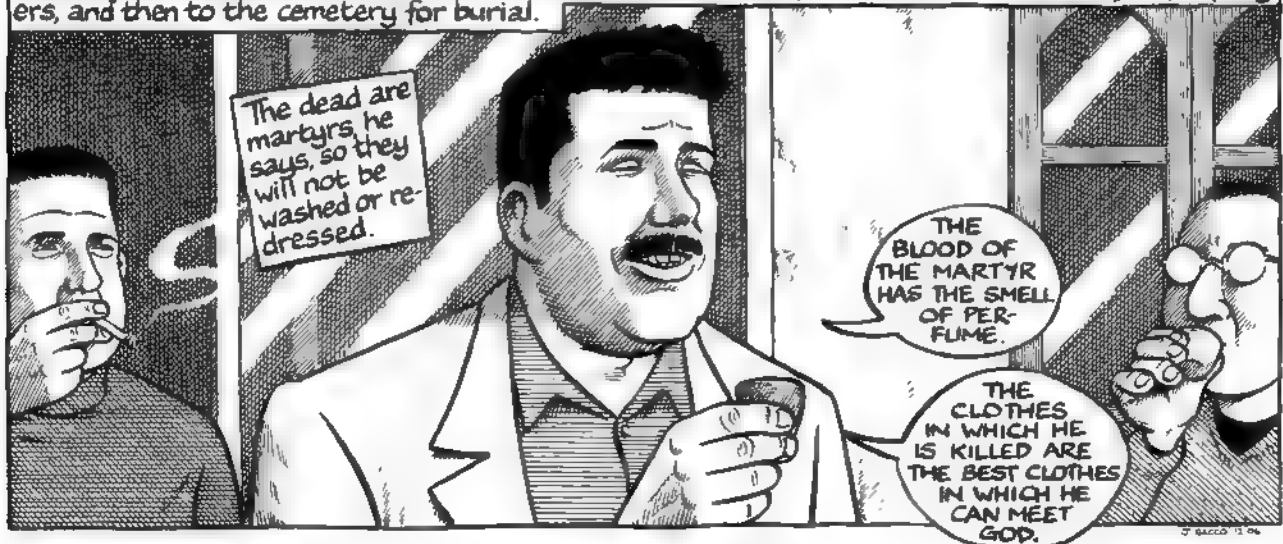
Old stories are a sure thing.

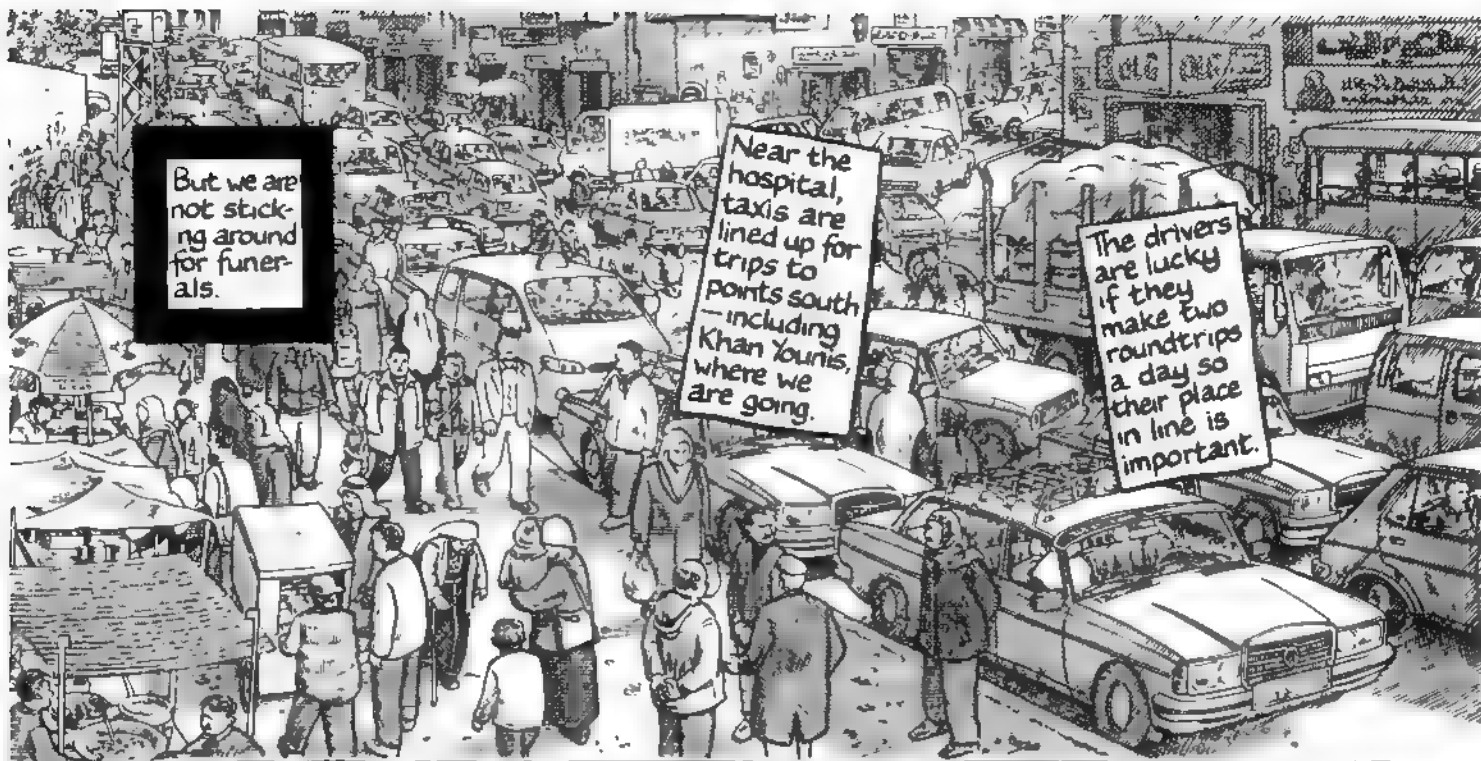
CLAUSTROPHOBIA





Hani explains that the bodies will be carried to their homes, then taken to the mosque for prayers, and then to the cemetery for burial.





But we are not sticking around for funerals.

Near the hospital, taxis are lined up for trips to points south — including Khan Younis, where we are going.

The drivers are lucky if they make two roundtrips a day so their place in line is important.

But there's a woman waiting in the front seat of the taxi slated to leave next, and Hani, who is tall for a Palestinian, doesn't want to sit in the cramped rear seats.



Propriety, however, prohibits him from asking the woman to change seats.

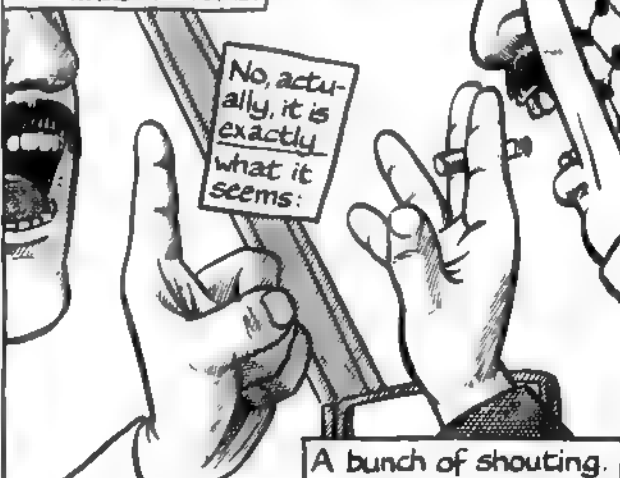
Hani's solution is to sit in the front seat of the second taxi in line. We join him in back.



This sets off a shouting match between the first taxi driver, who thinks he's being cheated out of his customers, and Hani.



I've learned that a shouting match in Gaza is not what it seems.



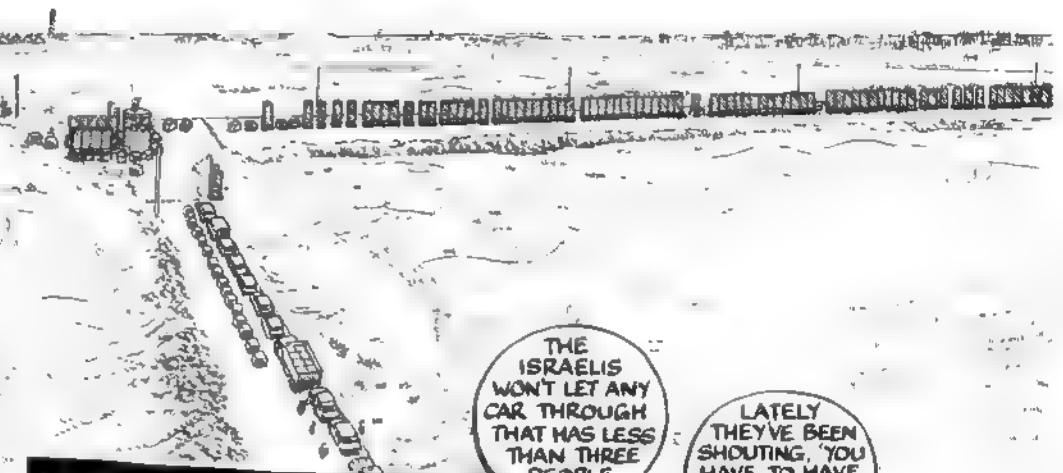
No, actually, it is exactly what it seems:

A bunch of shouting.

Hani gets his way, and soon our taxi fills up and moves



The ride is smooth until the Abu Houli checkpoint, where we encounter the usual delay.

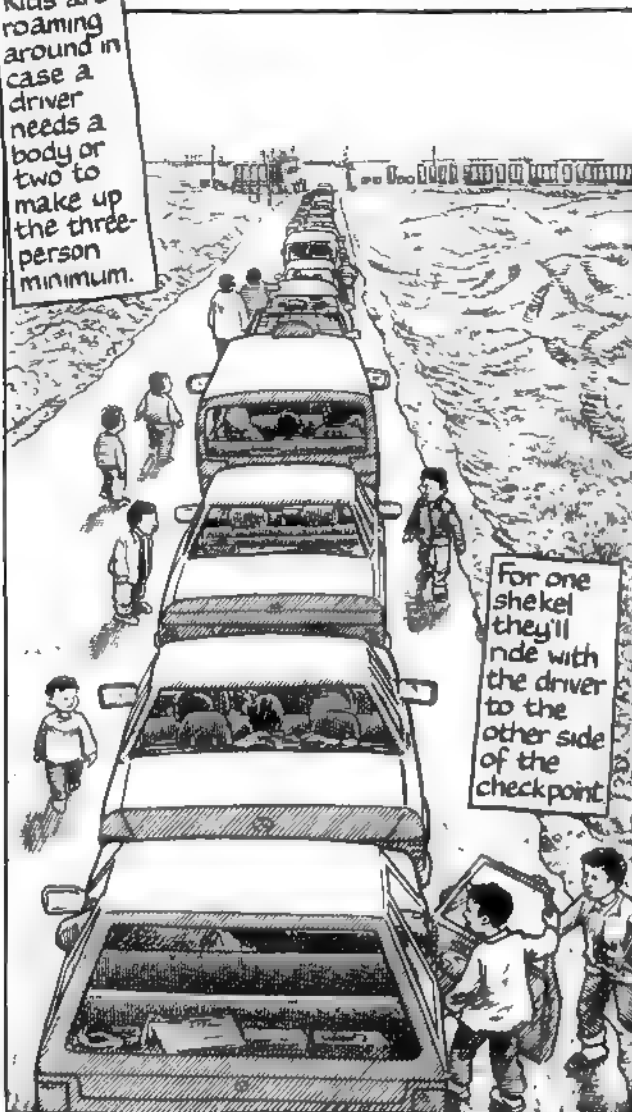


THE ISRAELIS WON'T LET ANY CAR THROUGH THAT HAS LESS THAN THREE PEOPLE IN IT

LATELY THEY'VE BEEN SHOUTING, 'YOU HAVE TO HAVE THREE! THREE!' BY LOUD-SPEAKER.

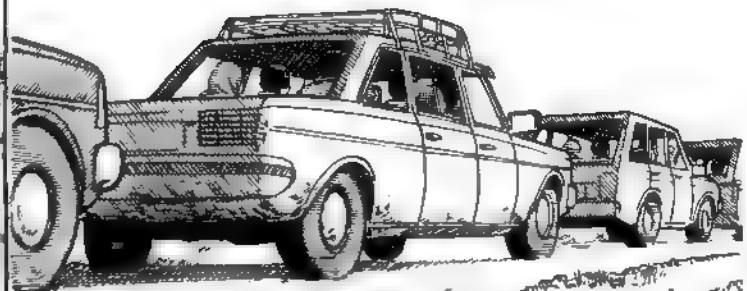


Kids are roaming around in case a driver needs a body or two to make up the three-person minimum.

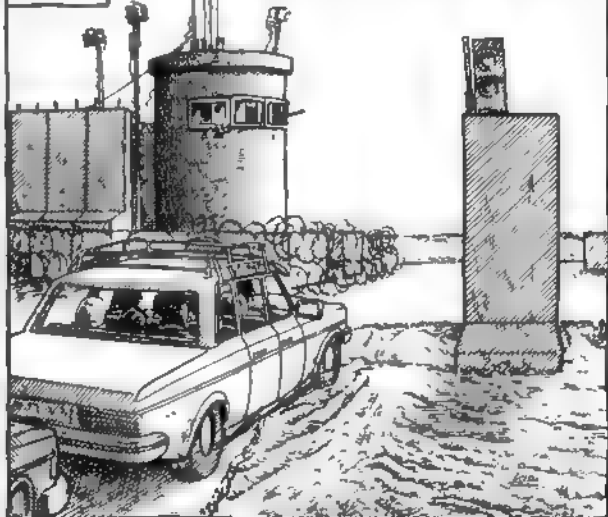


For one shekel they'll ride with the driver to the other side of the checkpoint.

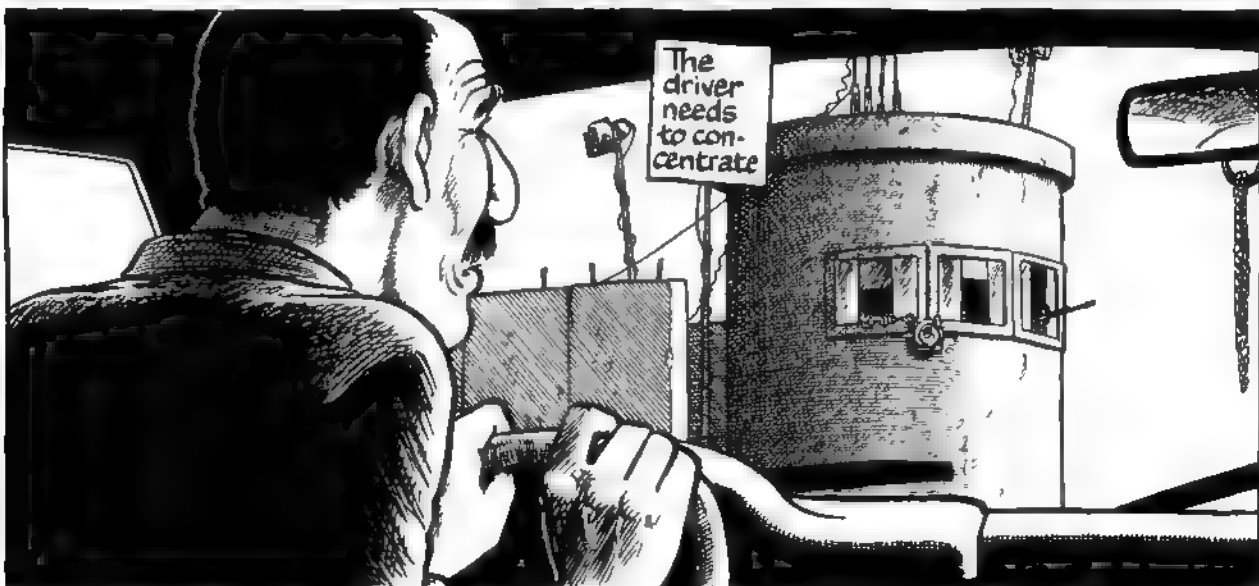
The line moves slowly.

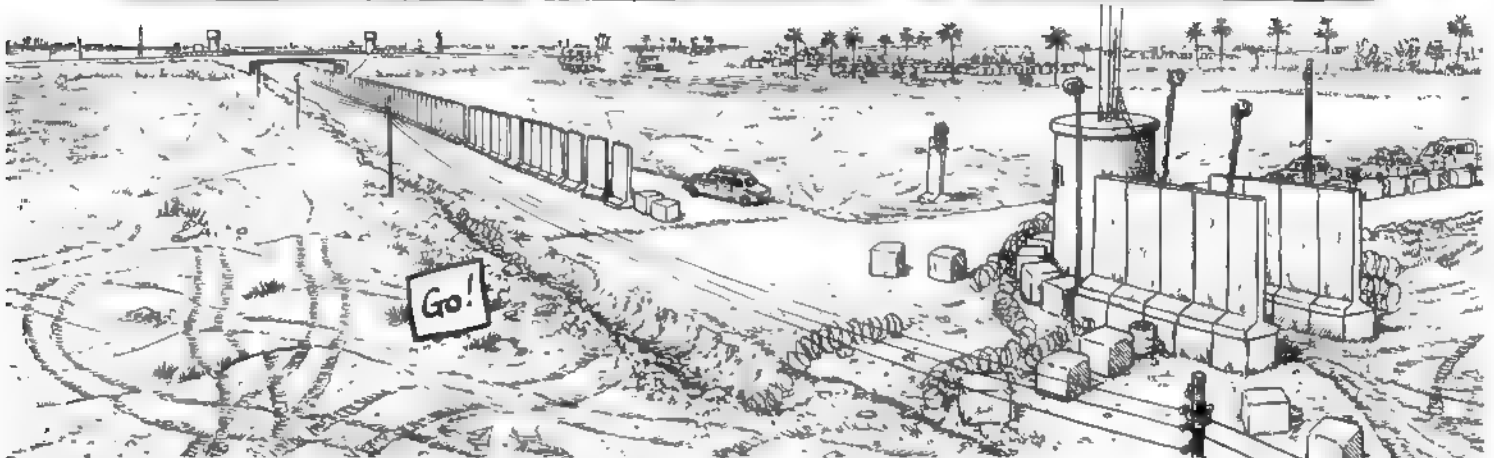
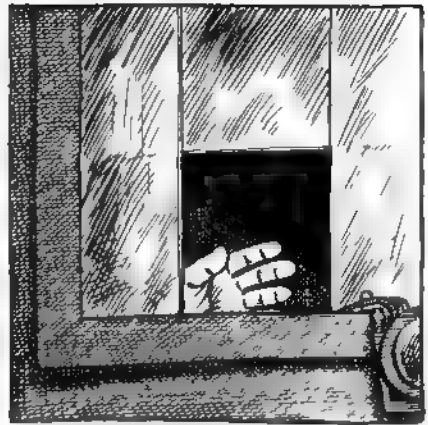
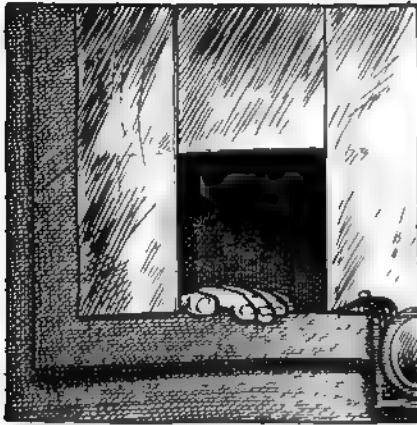


Everyone shuts up when we reach the first tower.

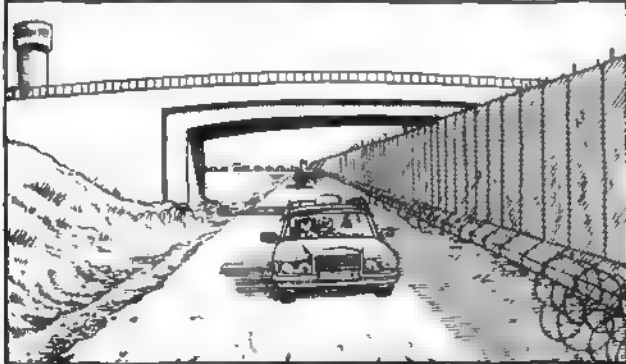


The driver needs to concentrate



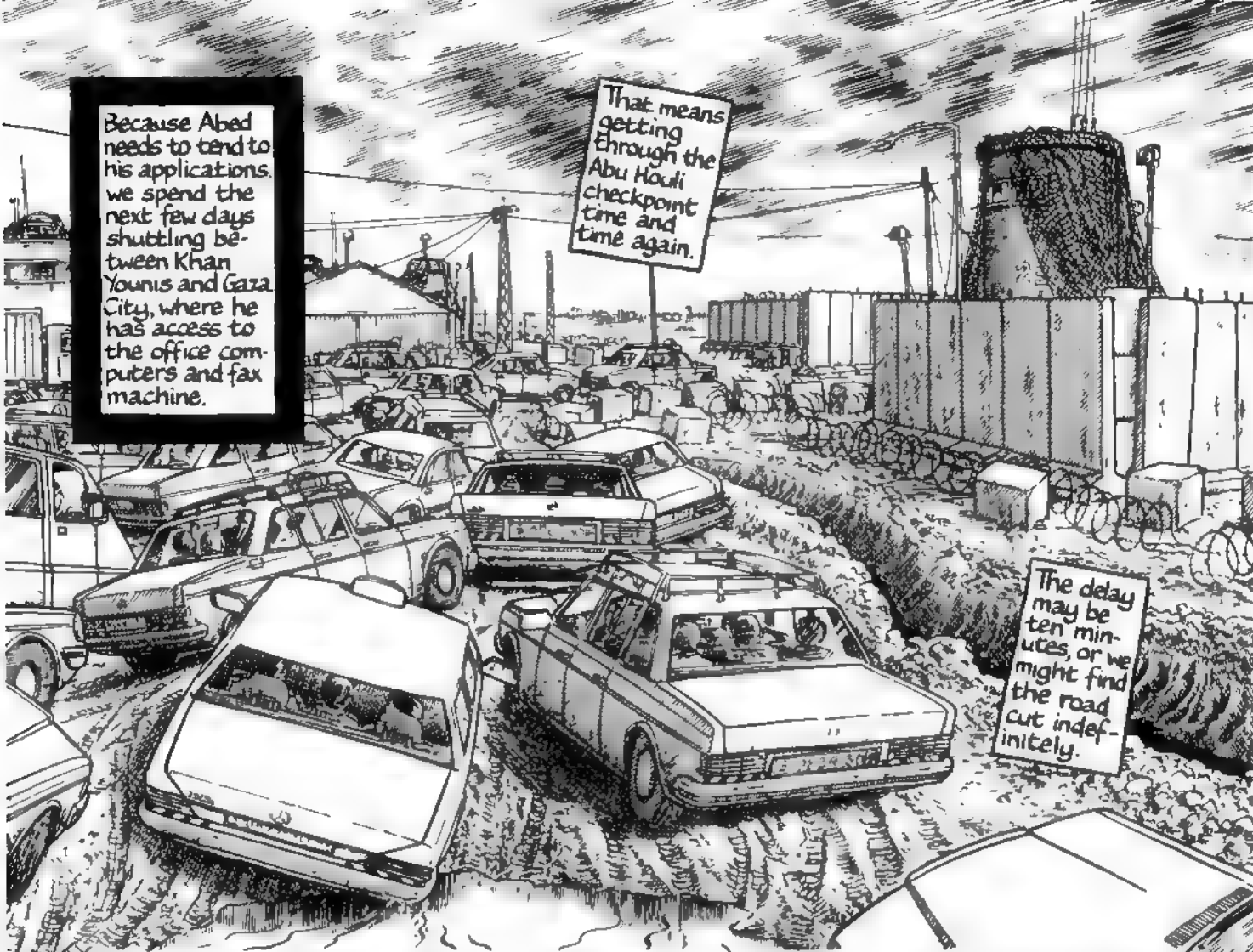


We drive under the bomb-proofed settler bypass bridge to the second tower a few hundred meters away,



where our taxi slows to a non-threatening crawl.





Because Abed needs to tend to his applications, we spend the next few days shuttling between Khan Younis and Gaza City, where he has access to the office computers and fax machine.

That means getting through the Abu Houli checkpoint time and time again.

The delay may be ten minutes, or we might find the road cut indefinitely.

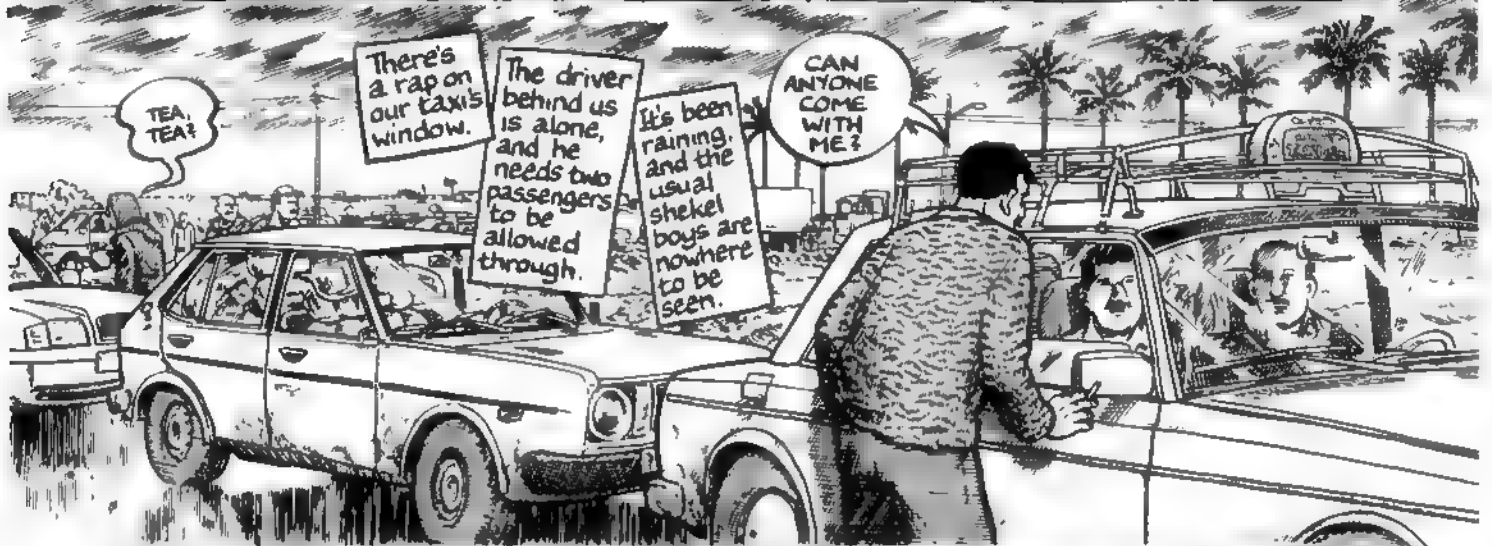
"Whenever I'm in Gaza City," Abed tells me, "I prepare myself for being stuck for a day or even a week."

Me, I've learned to bring along a change of underwear.

Once, while we're in Gaza City, we hear of a suicide attack on one of the Abu Houli towers.

Apparently, a Palestinian car, carrying three men so as not to arouse suspicion, suddenly raced at the Israeli position, passengers firing, and detonated.

The Palestinians were killed; a few Israeli soldiers were diagnosed with shock.



As we finally reach the checkpoint we look around for signs of yesterday's suicide attack.

MANY MEN HAVE BEEN MARYED ATTACKING THESE TWO FUCKING TOWERS.

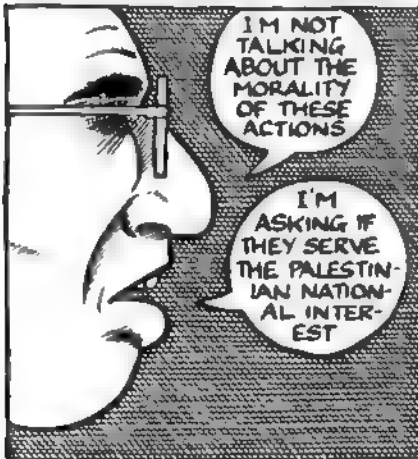
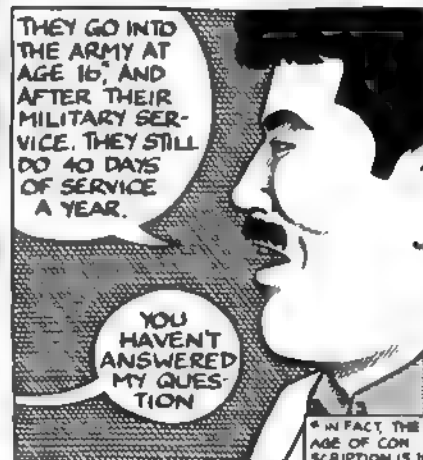
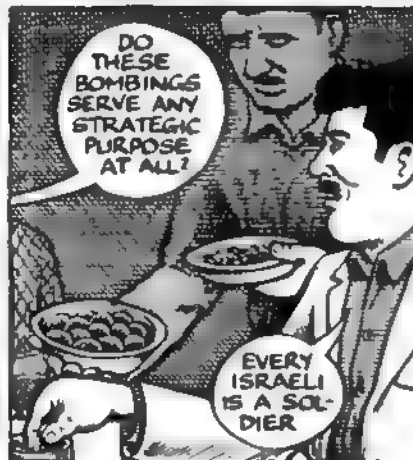
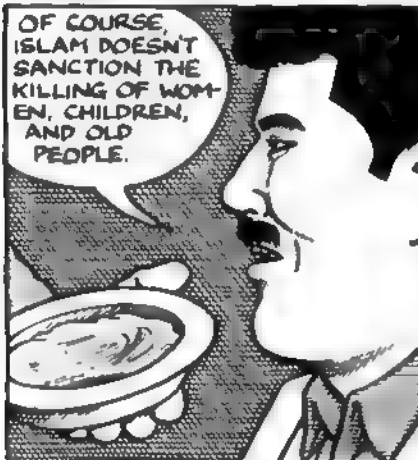
Were told this is the tower the three men targetted.

Save for a few scraps from the blown-up car, little remains to tell the tale.

The Israeli position is unscathed.

The lack of serious Israeli casualties in the Abu Houli suicide attack has disappointed the Palestinians.

ALL OF US WILL GET A BEATING



Khaled, the wanted man, hears I am back in Khan Younis and has shown up for lunch.



Bush appears on the set brimming with determination.



Everyone laughs when he refers to Iraq as "a prison."



Do they laugh because they don't think Iraq is a prison? Or because they believe they are the ones living in a prison?

"The game is over," Bush tells the world.



A night or two later, gunfire and explosions keep me awake.

A night or two later, gunfire and explosions keep me awake.



The Israelis are demolishing eight homes in Khan Younis; a woman reportedly dies of a heart attack.

In a taxi the next morning, one passenger mutters to himself for a few seconds, and then...



THE SULTA VIOLATES OUR DIGNITY, AND THE ARAB REGIMES ARE USELESS.



THE AMERICANS TAKE TURNS STEPPING ON OUR HEADS AND THE HEADS OF THE IRAQIS!



AFTER IRAQ THEY'LL ATTACK SYRIA UNTIL ALL OF US WILL GET A BEATING!!

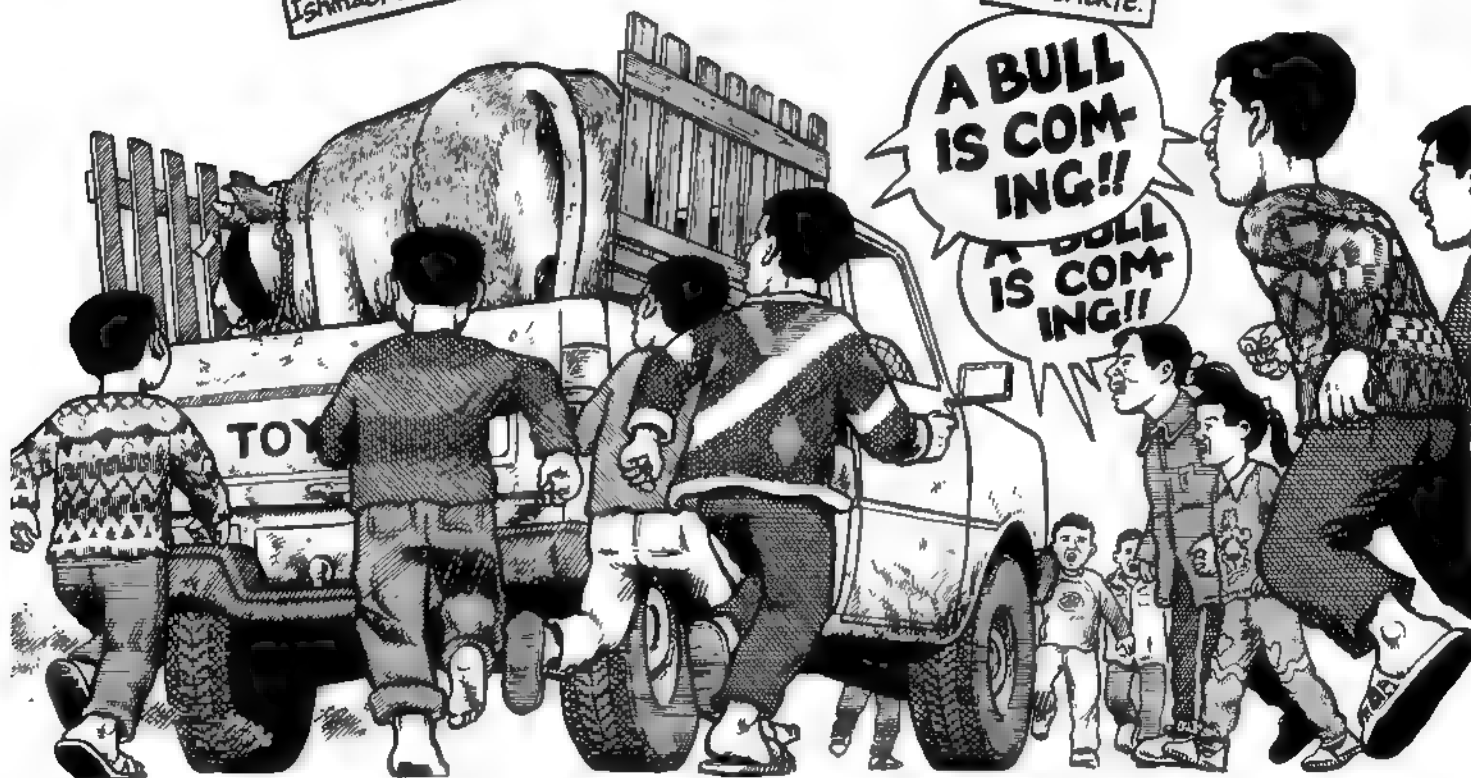
We've suspended our research for a few days.

No one wants to sit down for an interview about \$6 during Eid El-Adha, the feast which commemorates Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his son Ishmael to Allah.

FEAST

Over the last week goats and fams have been coaxed and pulled down the streets of Khan Younis in a lonely, sad trickle.

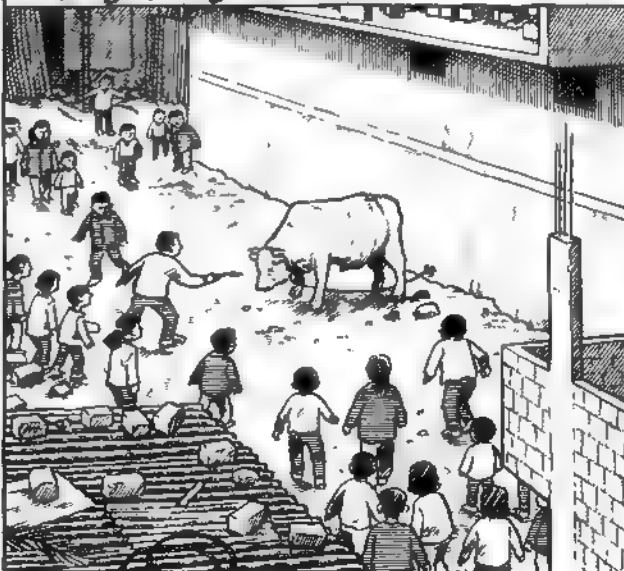
But this is the eve of the feast, and now the bulls are arriving.



The animals are made to jump out of vehicles and are driven into empty stores, where they'll spend their final night in solitude ..



or taken to back lots where they'll have the company of delighted children.



In the evening
Abed and I go
over to see the
650 kg bull pur-
chased for about
\$1,400 by his
family and the
families of six
uncles and
cousins.



The next
morning
men from
each of
the house
holds shar-
ing in the
bull gather
to partici-
pate in the
slaughter



But the
butcher is
late, and
Mahmoud
and Abu
Hamed are
wondering
where he is

IF HE
DOESN'T
COME, WE'LL
KILL IT OUR-
SELVES

IT
TAKES MEN
TO TIE IT
DOWN, BUT
WE'RE MEN
GOOD ONLY
FOR WOM-
EN...



AND
BARELY
GOOD FOR
WOMEN



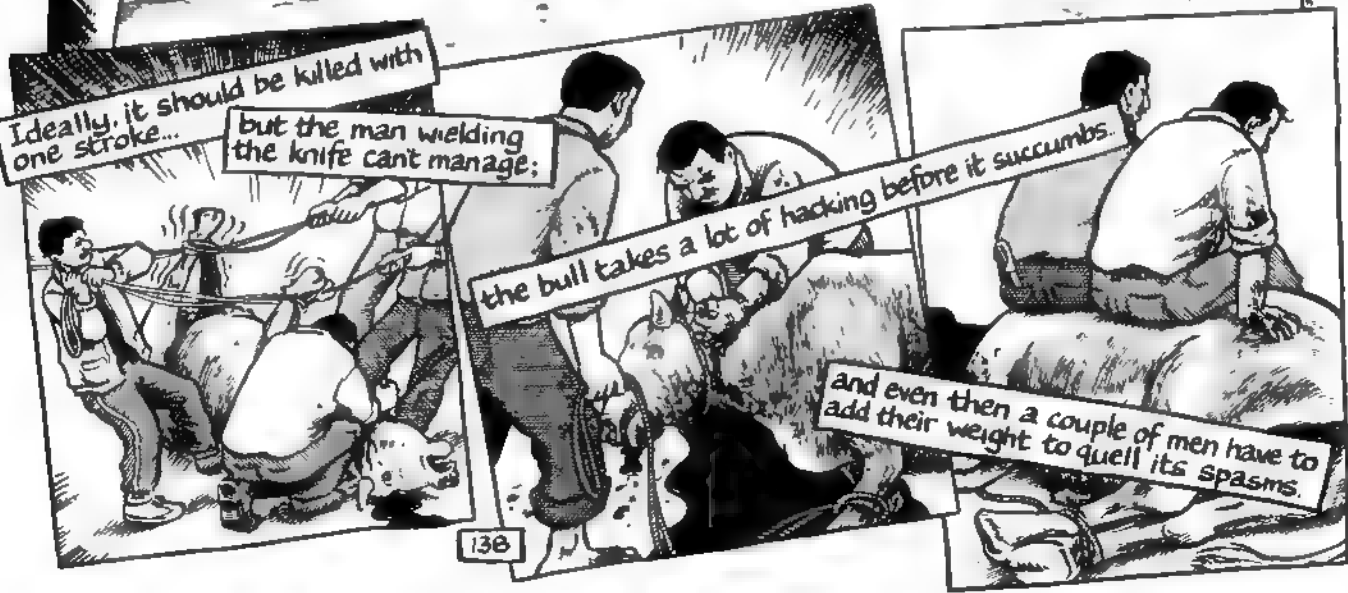
Meanwhile,
nearby, a
bull is being
dragged in-
to the
street.

Ideally, it should be killed with
one stroke...

but the man wielding
the knife can't manage;

the bull takes a lot of hacking before it succumbs.

and even then a couple of men have to
add their weight to quell its spasms.





Meanwhile, we're still waiting for the butcher.

Bored, Abu Hamed asks what I'm doing in Gaza.

Abed explains my '56 project.

'56?

He was six years old then, he says, but he remembers

"Before the Israelis entered Khan Younis," he tells us.

I WAS IN A MARKET WHEN WE CAME UNDER AIR ATTACK.

I RAN FROM SHOP TO SHOP BETWEEN PLANES.

A half century has passed, and things seem just as bleak.

WE MAKE A SACRIFICE OF THE BULLS, AND SHARON* MAKES A SACRIFICE OF US.

*ARIEL SHARON, THEN PRIME MINISTER OF ISRAEL

Finally, the long overdue butcher pulls up.

WAS HE IN FRANCE OR WHAT?

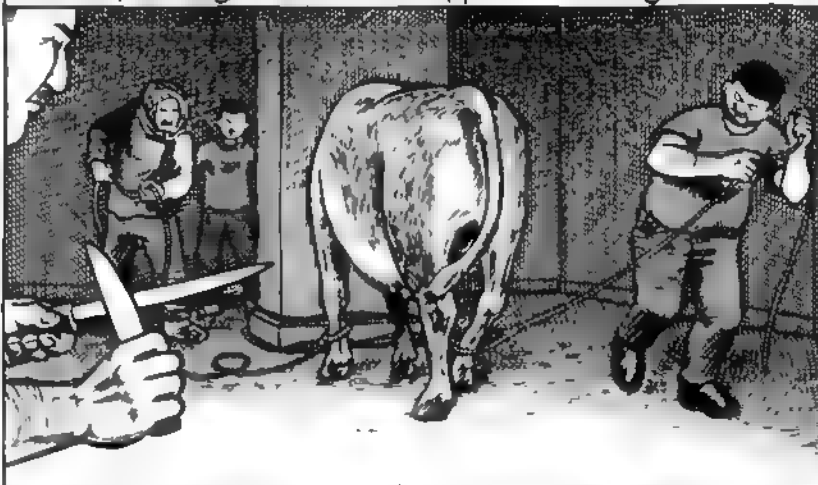
The butcher is with his son They have other appointments this morning so the store is opened right away to reveal the bull.



This is nothing personal, but the bull knows something is up.



The butcher sharpens his knives while his son expertly lassoes a front leg and then the opposite hind leg



Now everyone gets in on the act. The ropes are crossed and pulled...



and the bull goes down.



When the butcher is satisfied that the animal cannot right itself, he steps forward.



He strikes three times before he breaks through the hide.



The son takes the father's place.



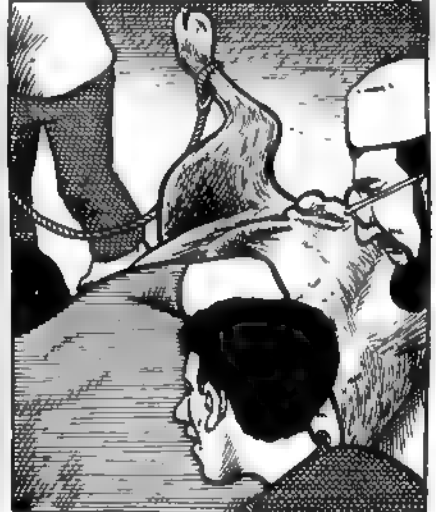
He has a small knife, but he drives it in so deep that his fists disappear into the bull's throat.



As he hacks, the butcher works to extend the cuts to the sides.



The bull has stopped kicking.



The other men join in, cutting through the neck and twisting off the head.



Cinder blocks are brought in to support the carcass which is flayed...



while the legs are cut off at the knee joints.





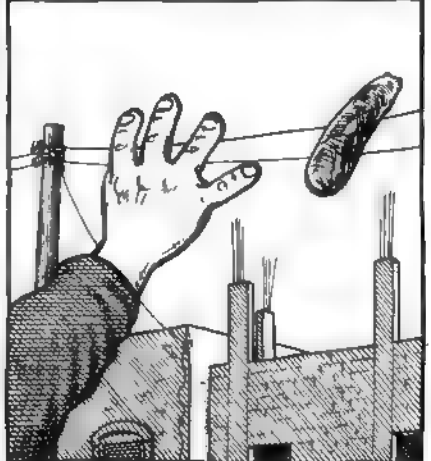
The bull is split open and the organs are removed.



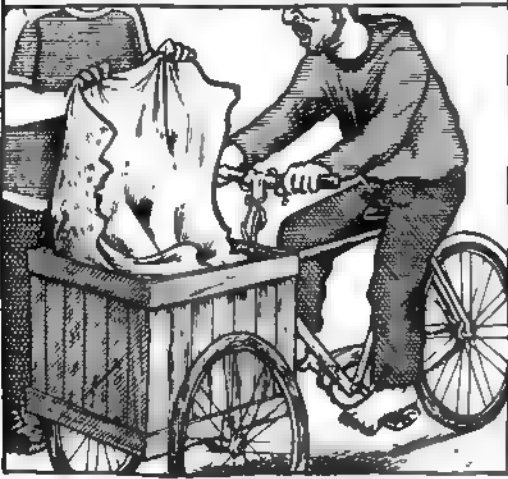
The stomach and intestines are dumped on the sidewalk.



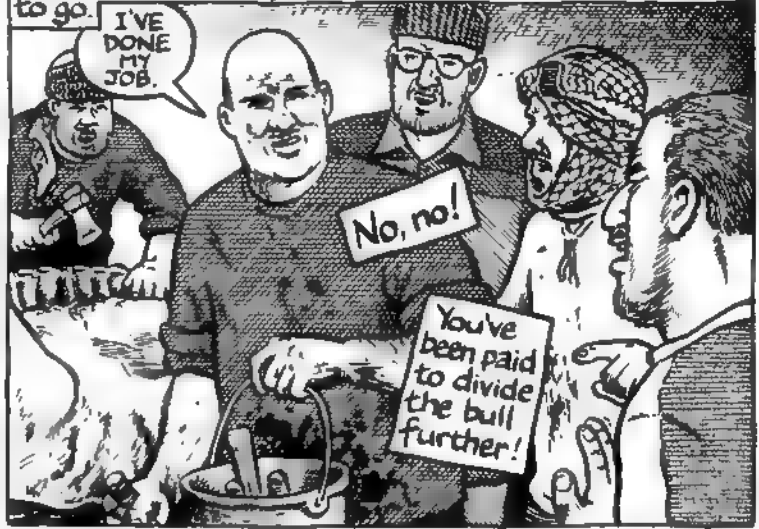
The toxic spleen is handed gingerly to a boy who throws it like a grenade into the street.



The hide is given to a poor spastic man who has asked for it. He might fetch 50 shekels (\$10) from a dealer.



The bull has been quartered, and the butcher prepares to go.



Grumpily, he cuts away a while longer before leaving for his next \$50 appointment.



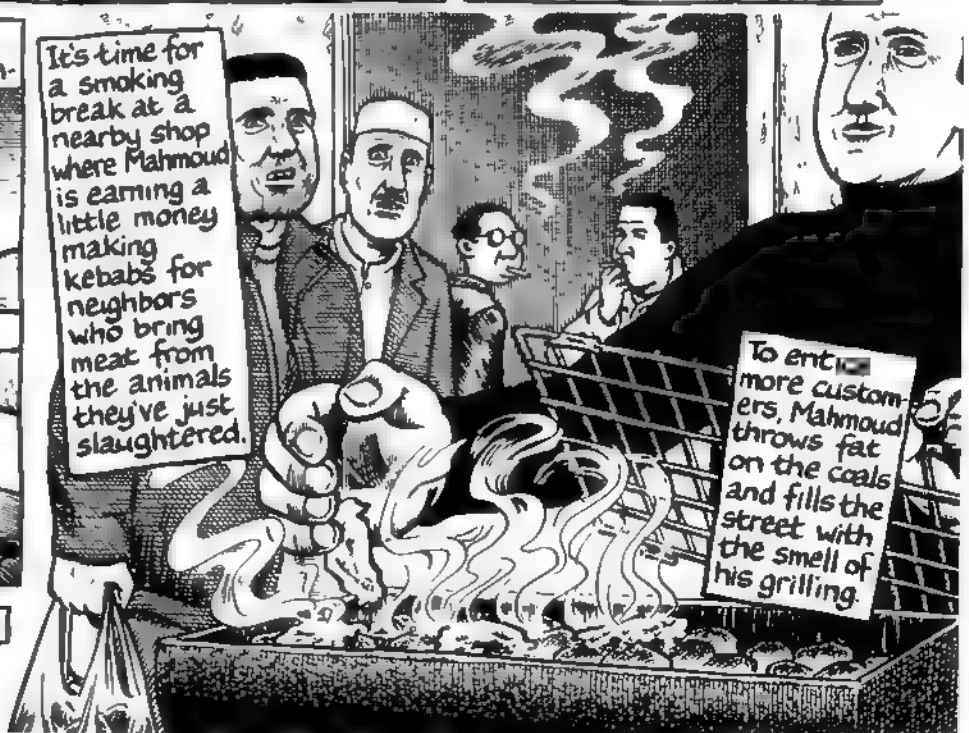
The pieces of the animal are taken a couple of doors down to be hung up and washed.



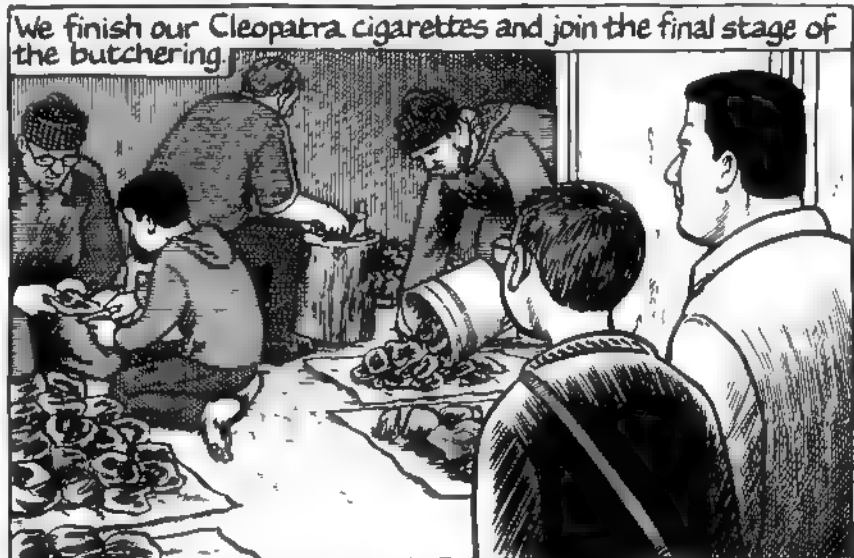
The men begin slicing off chunks and dropping them in to buckets.



It's time for a smoking break at a nearby shop where Mahmoud is earning a little money making kebabs for neighbors who bring meat from the animals they've just slaughtered.



Abed is staring absently at a poster depicting a couple of martyrs.



The meat has been separated into piles representing the different parts of the animal and is cut up into even smaller bits.



The pieces are divided into seven equal portions, one for each household.



With all the family heads assembled, the portions are distributed by lot.



The entire process from butchering the bull to allotting the meat, has taken four hours.



But there's more. Each household must now further divide its portion: a third is for the family; a third is passed out to close relatives and friends; and a third goes to the poor.



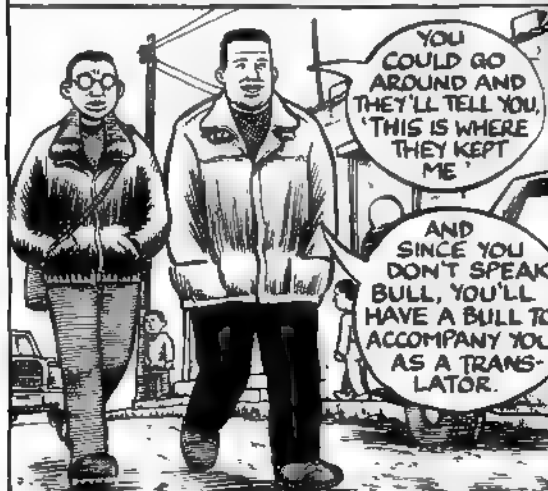
Abed's mother hands plastic bags full of meat to one of her sons and mentions the name of an old woman.



An hour later, Abed and I are eating our first meal from the bull.



The next day Abed jokes that I ought to interview bulls about their massacre



A hard rain has begun just as everyone hoped.

While Israeli bombers roar low and unseen overhead, it washes the blood from the streets.

HANI

A day or two later, Hani pays us a visit from Rafah, where he lives in the refugee camp.

He says the butcher was late to his place, and in the end he decided to take care of the killing himself.

BUT I COULDN'T DO IT.

THE COW WAS TREMBLING AND DIDN'T RESIST.

I DIDN'T HAVE THE HEART TO GO THROUGH WITH IT EVEN THOUGH THE COW WAS DOWN AND I HAD ALREADY SAID 'IN THE NAME OF GOD, GOD IS GREAT.'

EVERYONE LAUGHED AND MY FAMILY TEASED ME.

Eventually the butcher came and did the deed.

But Hani took no part in skinning or cutting up the carcass

He couldn't bring himself to eat from the cow, either.

Hani has put himself in charge of logistics for the next phase of my investigations, which will be centered in Rafah.

On my introductory visit to the camp there, the kids follow me around as usual-

HOW ARE YOU?

HOW ARE YOU?

-until Hani politely tells them to shove off.

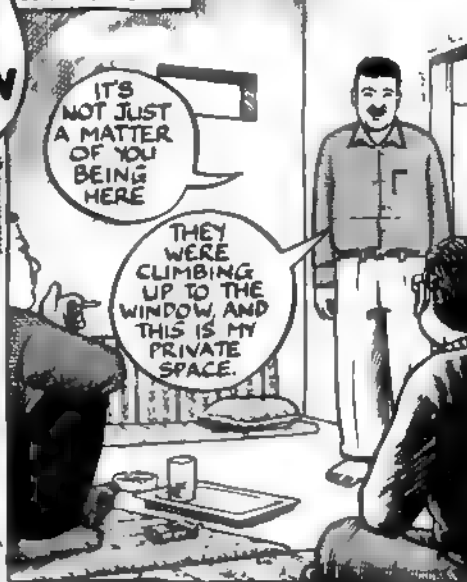
But when we are sitting in his front room and they climb the wall to peer inside, he blows his top.



DON'T EMBARRASS ME! I'LL TELL YOUR FATHER TO BREAK OPEN YOUR HEAD!



When Hani returns he has already calmed down



During the First Intifada, when Hani was in his mid-teens, he was jumped by an Israeli undercover unit while he was spray-painting slogans and shot seven times at close range.



THEY TOOK ME BY HELICOPTER TO AN ISRAELI HOSPITAL.

NOT BECAUSE THEY WANTED TO SAVE ME, BUT BECAUSE THEY WANTED INFORMATION

After he recovered, he was put in prison.

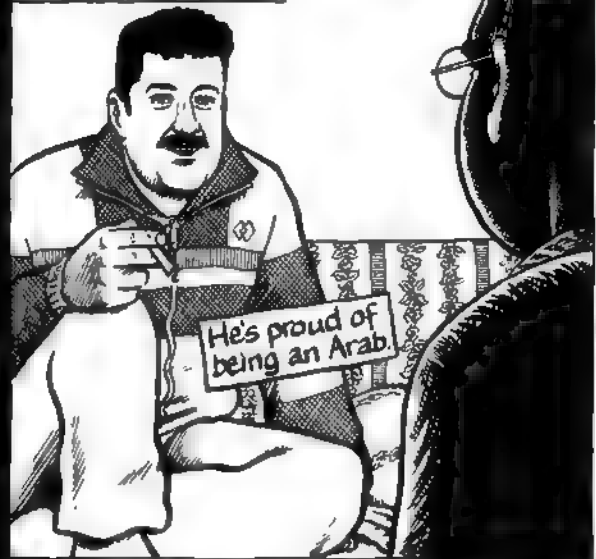
I WAS KEPT IN A TINY ROOM FOR DAYS

THEY THREW URINE ON ME

AND THE INTERROGATOR WOULD BANG MY HEAD ON THE WALL.



He's proud of that. He's a Bedouin, and proud of that as well; he enjoys explaining Bedouin traditions.

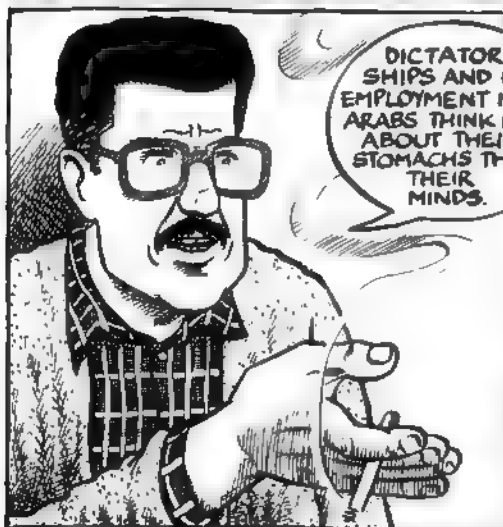


Once, he takes me to see a friend of his, a teacher of Arabic named Abu Mohammed, who is interested in my '56 project and contends that Arabs don't know their own history.

ARABS DON'T READ.

Hani takes exception to this, but Abu Mohammed is insistent.

THE CULTURAL PRODUCTION OF ONLY ONE COUNTRY — SPAIN — IS MORE THAN THAT OF THE ENTIRE ARAB WORLD.



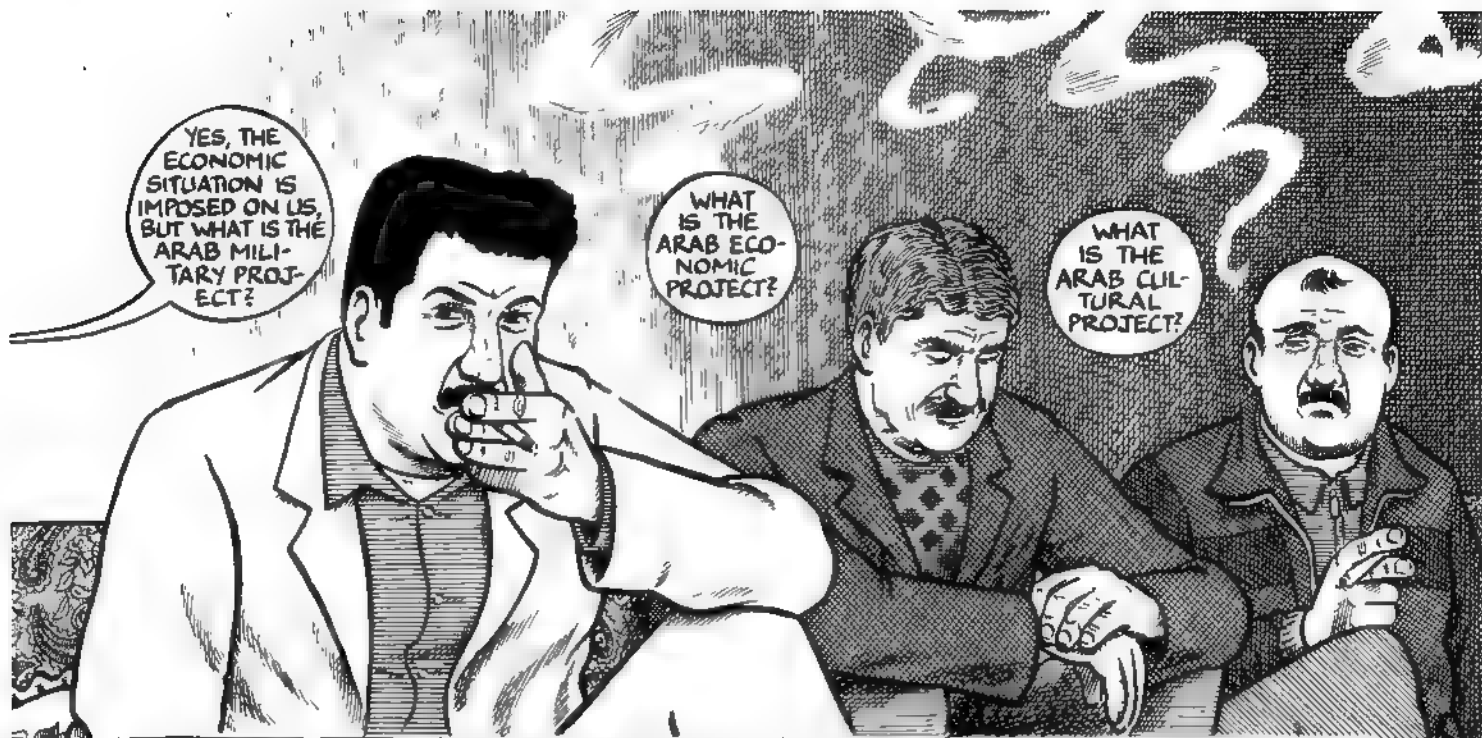
Everyone erupts, especially Hani

COLONIZATION AND OCCUPATION ARE AT FAULT! WHERE DOES OUR ECONOMY COME FROM?

He answers his own question:

FROM THEM!

The colonizers and occupiers!

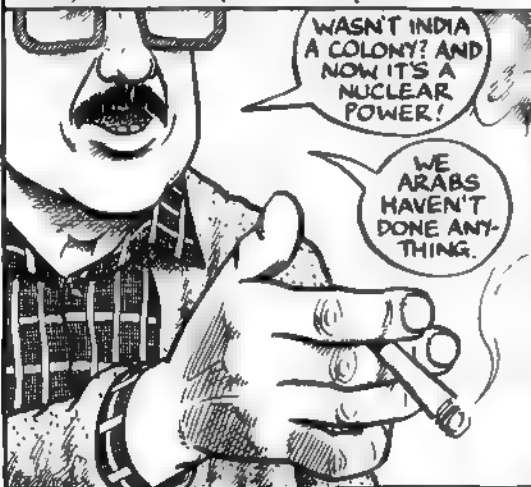


YES, THE ECONOMIC SITUATION IS IMPOSED ON US, BUT WHAT IS THE ARAB MILITARY PROJECT?

WHAT IS THE ARAB ECONOMIC PROJECT?

WHAT IS THE ARAB CULTURAL PROJECT?

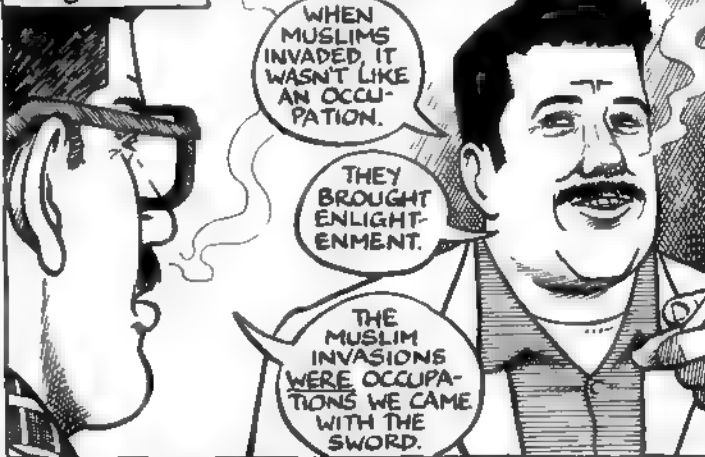
Is everything as it is, Abu Mohammed asks, because of outside forces?



WASN'T INDIA A COLONY? AND NOW IT'S A NUCLEAR POWER!

WE ARABS HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING.

Even a discussion of past glories — like the Moors' conquest of Spain in the eighth century — ends in disagreement.



WHEN MUSLIMS INVADED, IT WASN'T LIKE AN OCCUPATION.

THEY BROUGHT ENLIGHTENMENT.

THE MUSLIM INVASIONS WERE OCCUPATIONS WE CAME WITH THE SWORD.

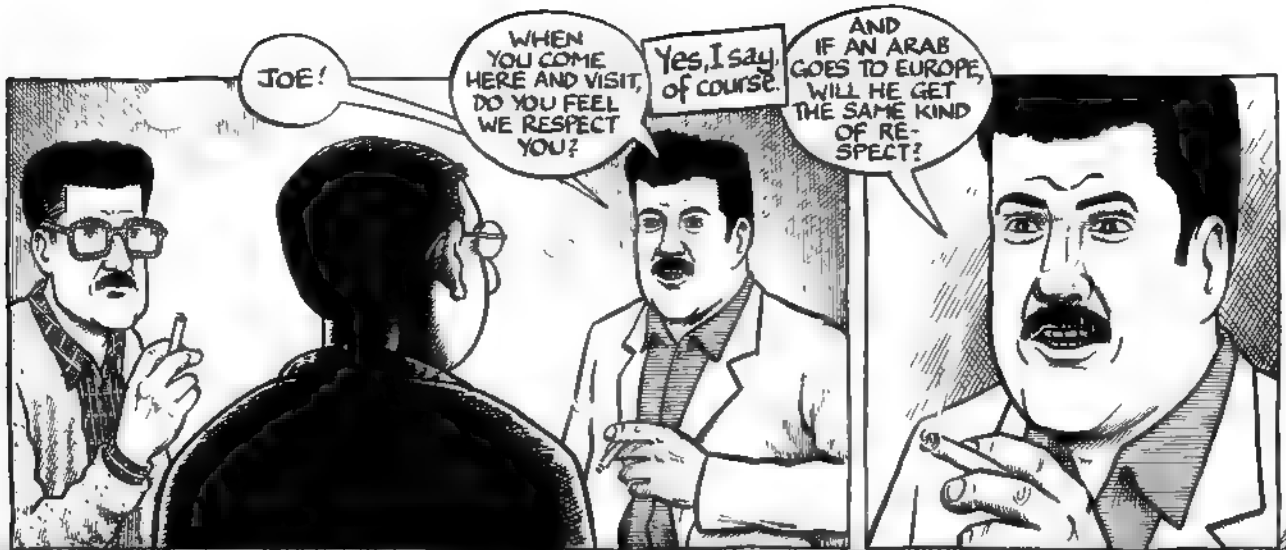
Abu Mohammed is on a roll, critical of what he perceives to be the Arab mindset from top to bottom.



I HAVE A FRIEND A NORWEGIAN WOMAN.

SHE SAYS SHE CAN RIDE IN A TAXI ALL THROUGH SWITZERLAND, FOR EXAMPLE, AND SHE DOESN'T HAVE A PROBLEM.

AS SOON AS SHE GETS INTO A TAXI HERE, SHE FEELS EVERYONE IS UNDRRESSING HER WITH HIS EYES.

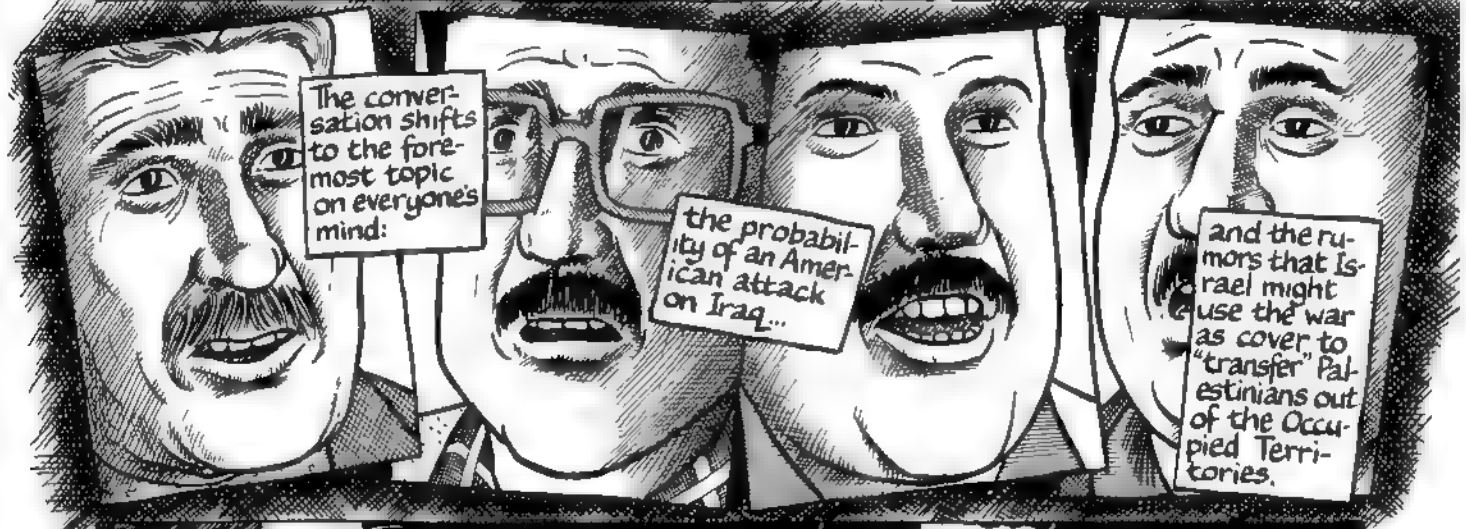


JOE!

WHEN YOU COME HERE AND VISIT, DO YOU FEEL WE RESPECT YOU?

Yes, I say, of course.

AND IF AN ARAB GOES TO EUROPE, WILL HE GET THE SAME KIND OF RESPECT?



The conversation shifts to the foremost topic on everyone's mind:

the probability of an American attack on Iraq...

and the rumors that Israel might use the war as cover to "transfer" Palestinians out of the Occupied Territories.



Hani darts a look at Abu Mohammed.

I RECOMMEND THIS NEIGHBORHOOD.



RAFAH



HOUSE HUNTING

It's time to find a place in Rafah, and Hani is insistent.

He doesn't want me living in the refugee camp.

He steers me toward the town proper where we look at a couple of apartments.

IT'S GOOD. YOU'RE CLOSE TO EVERYTHING HERE.

I STILL WANT TO LIVE IN THE CAMP.

Khaled, the wanted man, also tries to dissuade me.

YOU MIGHT COME UNDER SUSPICION.

THE CAMP HAS AREAS OF RESISTANCE.

IT'S BETTER THAT YOU STAY IN A PLACE HANI SUGGESTS.

YOU COULD EVEN FIND A PLACE THAT HAS A DOOR-MAN.

A door-man?

Abed and I explain the journalistic imperative of being in the thick of things, and in the end Khaled relents.

Two or three calls later, he's found a place for me in the camp center.

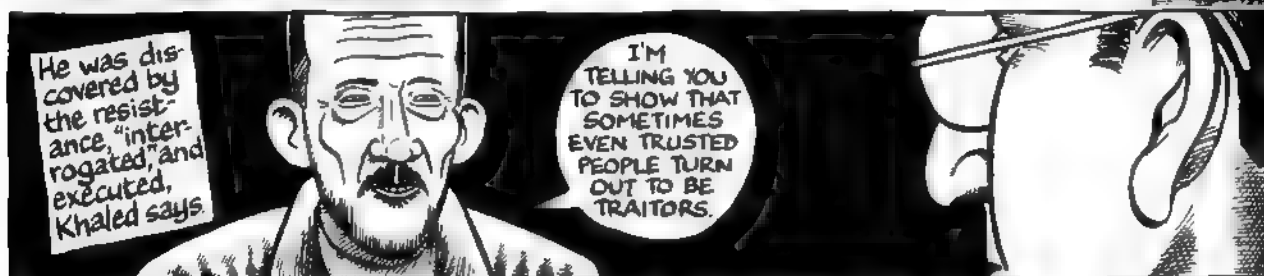
The next day, on our way to look at the apartment, we pay Hani a visit.

He's not pleased I've gone behind his back to secure a dwelling in the camp.

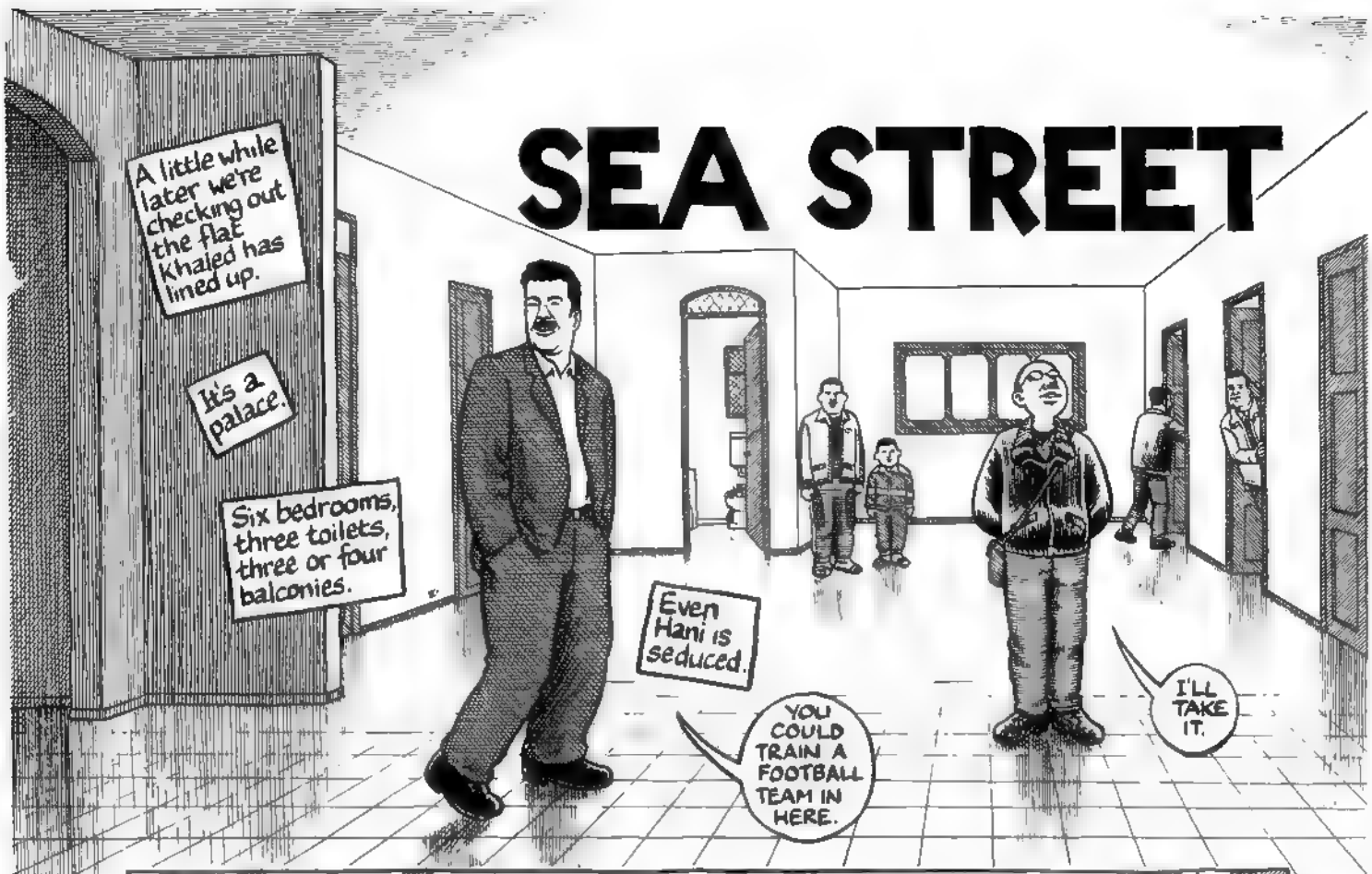
WHAT ABOUT HIS SAFETY?

HE IS IN RAFAH NOW!

I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR HIM!



SEA STREET



We're staying in a relatively safe area, but the sounds of conflict are ever present, especially after dark.

The eerie squeaking of treads lets us know Israeli vehicles are on the move.

Shooting punctuates the night.

Blasts rattle the walls and set roosters to crowing.

I wear earplugs, but sometimes I'm jolted up-right.



I'm convinced Abed could sleep through the apocalypse.

Z



If I fall back asleep, it won't be for long because the day starts early in Rafah.

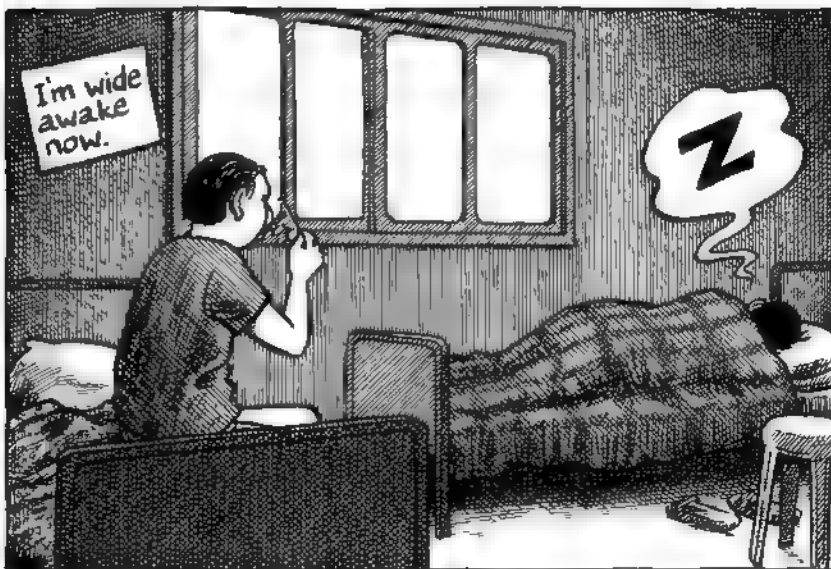
The blaring call to prayer is followed by tooting car horns and shrieking school children.

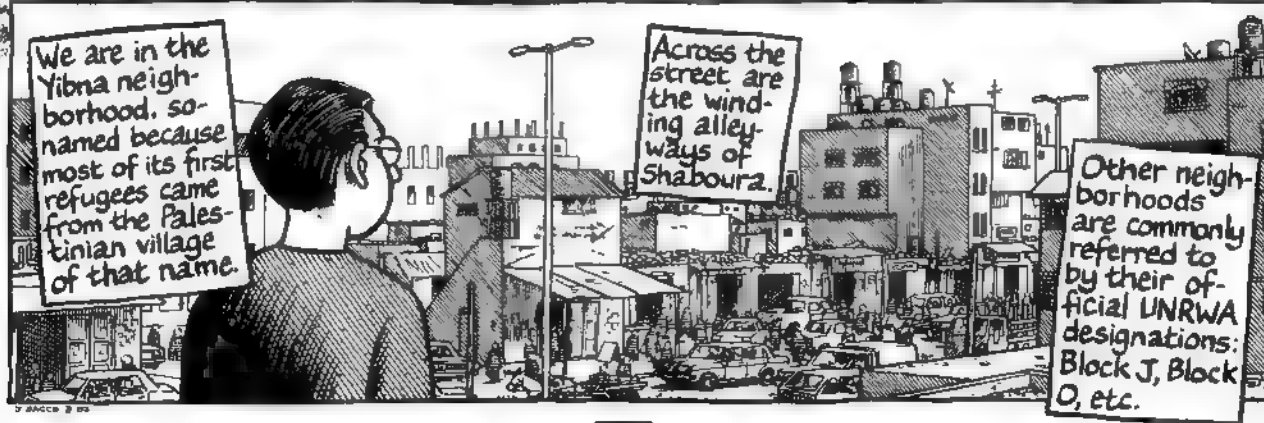
The clip-clapping of donkey feet is the final straw.



I'm wide awake now.

Z

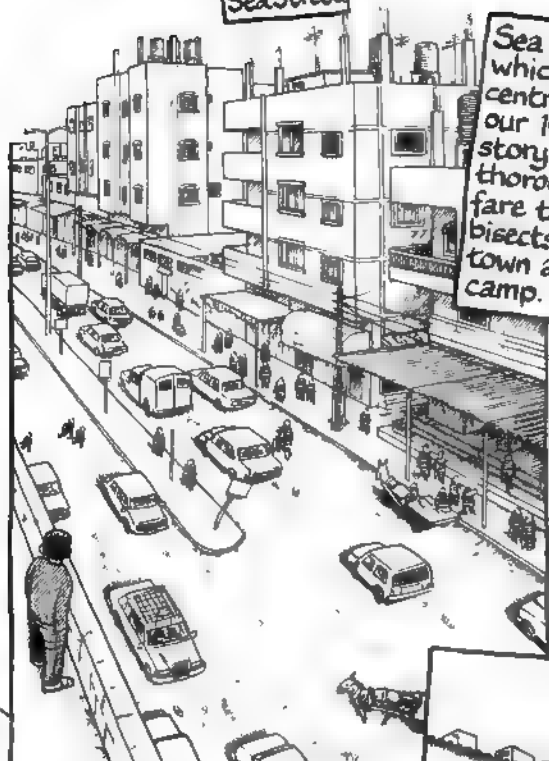




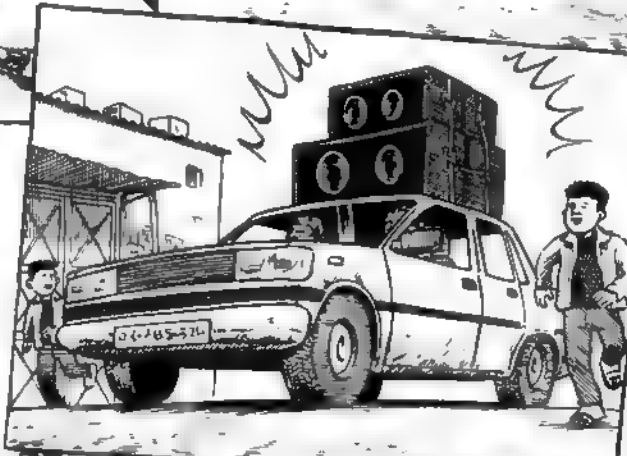
We live
right on
Sea Street.

Sea Street,
which is
central to
our 1956
story, is the
thorough-
fare that
bisects the
town and
camp.

When people are
shot on the town's
western side, ambu-
lances race up
Sea Street to El-
Najjar Hospital
on the eastern
outskirts

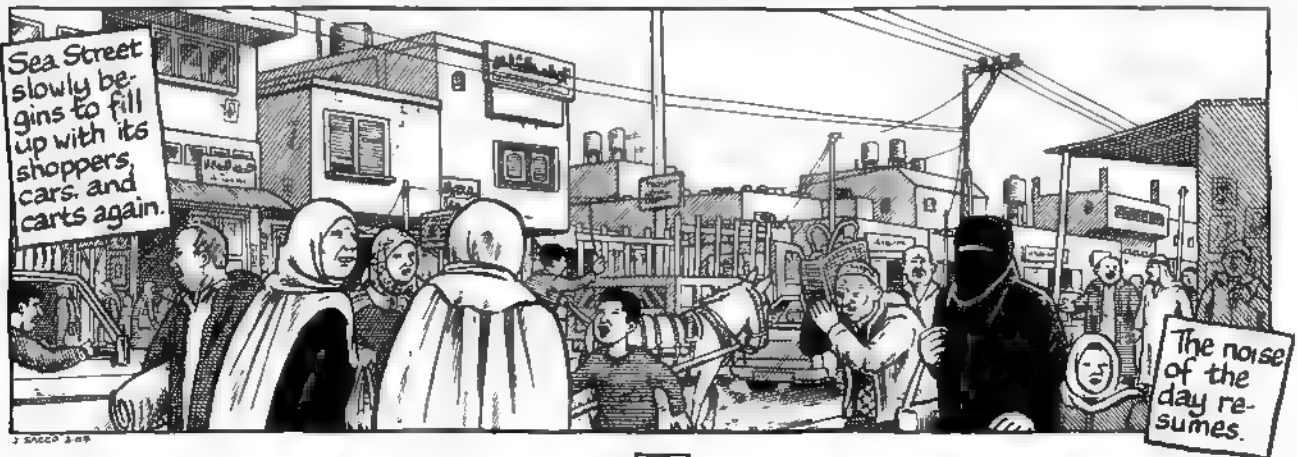


One morning,
after heavy
shooting and a
cacophonous
relay of ambu-
lances carry-
ing the wound-
ed, a car with
loudspeakers
set on full
distortion
cruises by to
announce the
death of a boy,
12 or 13 years
old.



A short while
later, Abed
and I watch
the funeral
procession go-
ing up Sea
Street.





RAFAH'S CURSE

This is a picture of Rafah in the early months of 2003 when the Israelis still physically occupy the Gaza Strip.

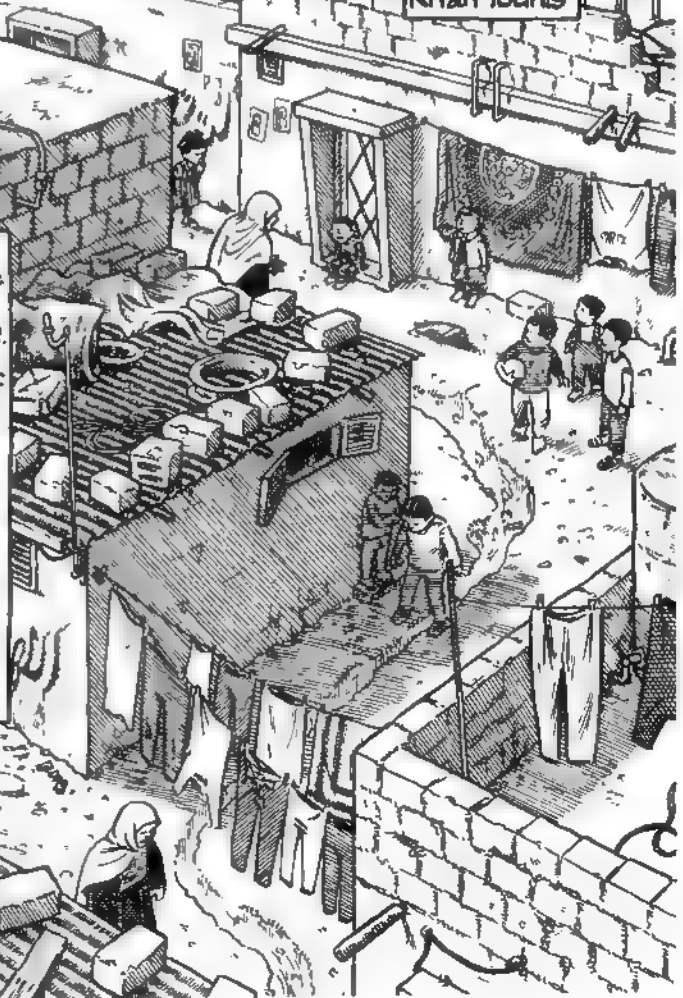
About 90,000 of Rafah's residents are refugees. The town's 'originals,' those who have lived in Rafah for generations, number about 30,000.

Rafah is hemmed in by the Egyptian border...

and by Jewish settlements, which cut Rafah off from the sea and block the quickest route to Khan Younis



The border area in particular is Rafah's curse. Under the provisions of agreements signed by Israel and the PLO, Israel was granted a "Military Installation Area" along the Egypt-Gaza frontier.



160

Israeli Settlement Territory

GAZA

Border

EGYPT

TAL EL-SULTAN

WESTERN CAMP

A number of heavily armed Israeli structures rise from this zone and dominate much of Rafah. These include the Tal Zorob tower, which overlooks western Rafah, and the Termit position, which looms over the desolate Salah Al-Din Gate.

Israeli Settlement Territory

-  BUILT-UP AREAS (SELECT NEIGHBORHOODS INDICATED IN CAPITAL LETTERS)
-  REFUGEE CAMP AREAS ENCLOSED IN HEAVY BLACK LINE UNRWA BLOCK DESIGNATIONS INDICATED IN BOXES
-  ISRAELI MILITARY INSTALLATION AREA
-  ISRAELI SECURITY CONTROL/PALESTINIAN CIVIL JURISDICTION

meters
0 100 200 300 400 500

Agricultural Area

TAL ZOROB

Philadelphi Route

YIBNA

SHABOURA

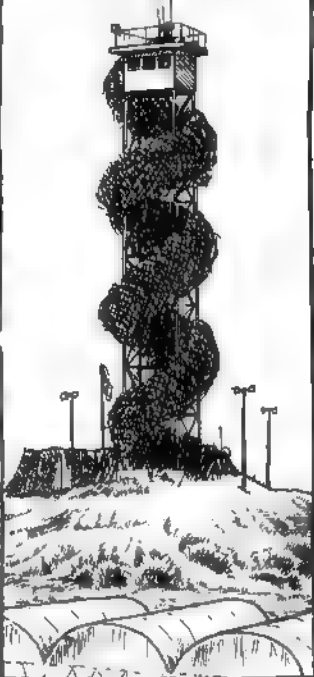
Salah Al-Din Gate

BRAZIL

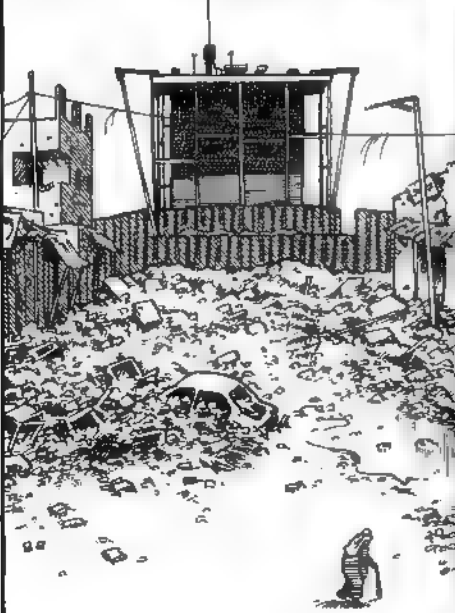
EL-SALAM

Border

TAL ZOROB TOWER

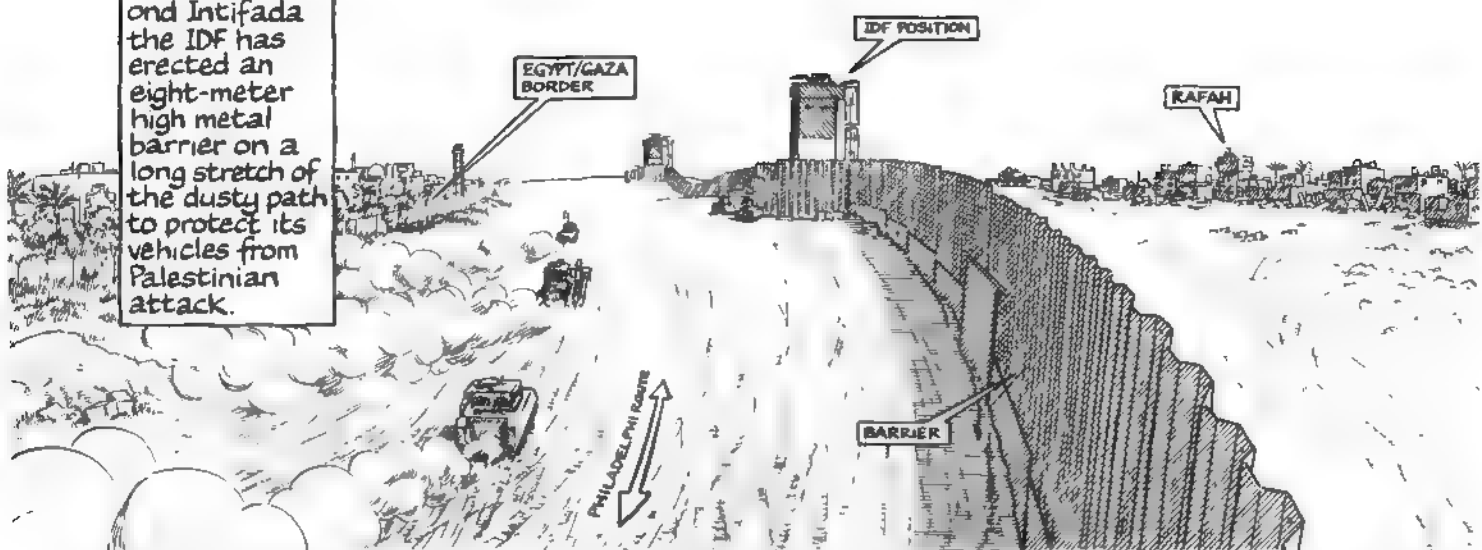


TERMIT POSITION



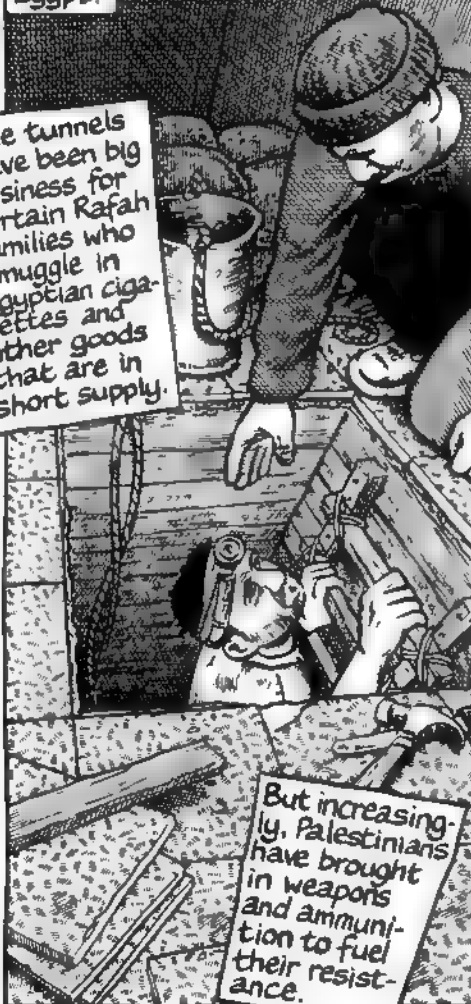
These posts are connected by a narrow strip of land known as the Philadelphi Route, which runs along the border fence.

Since the Second Intifada the IDF has erected an eight-meter high metal barrier on a long stretch of the dusty path to protect its vehicles from Palestinian attack.



Israel controls the Rafah Terminal, the entry point to Egypt, but the border is not completely sealed. The Palestinians have dug tunnels under the Philadelphi Route to Egypt.

The tunnels have been big business for certain Rafah families who smuggle in Egyptian cigarettes and other goods that are in short supply.



But increasingly, Palestinians have brought in weapons and ammunition to fuel their resistance.

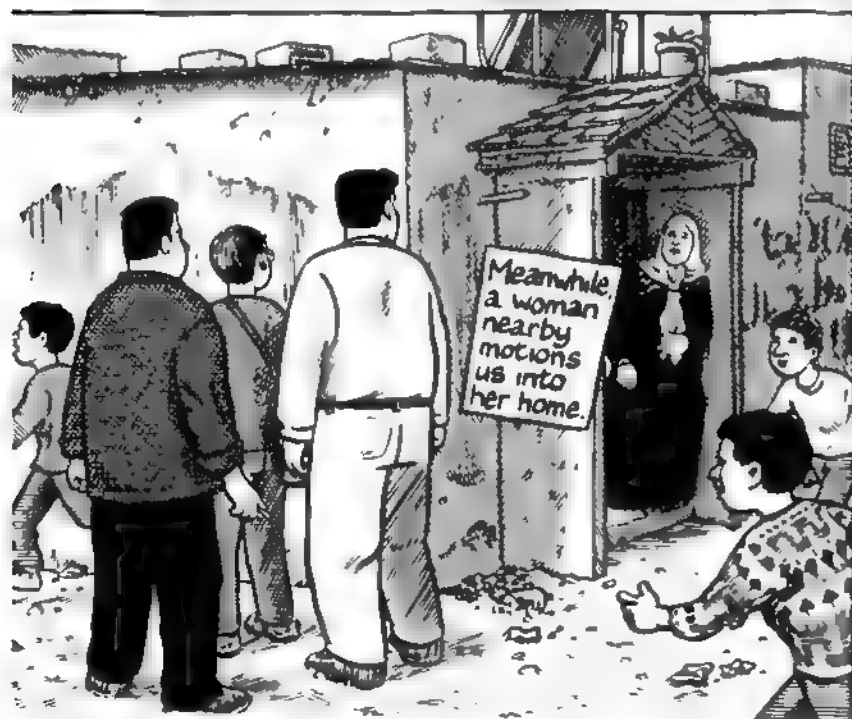
The IDF routinely raids Rafah to uncover tunnel "piers"

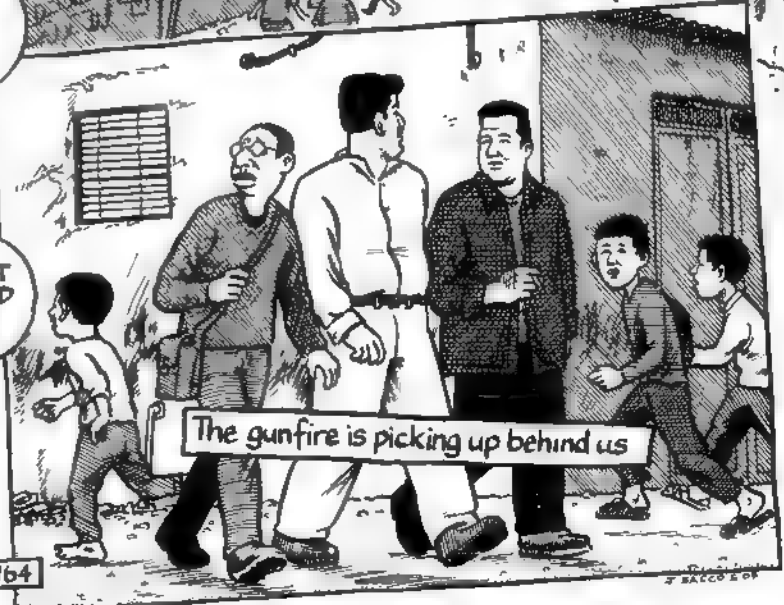
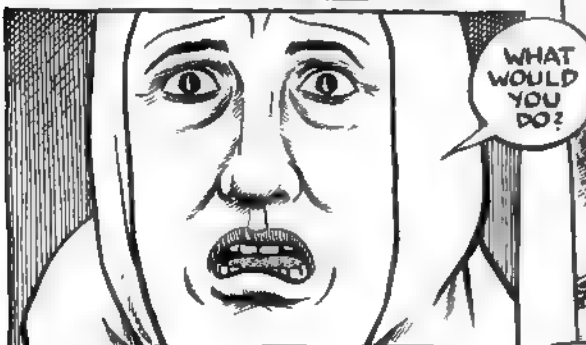
Any home hiding a tunnel or used to resist the Israeli incursions is destroyed.

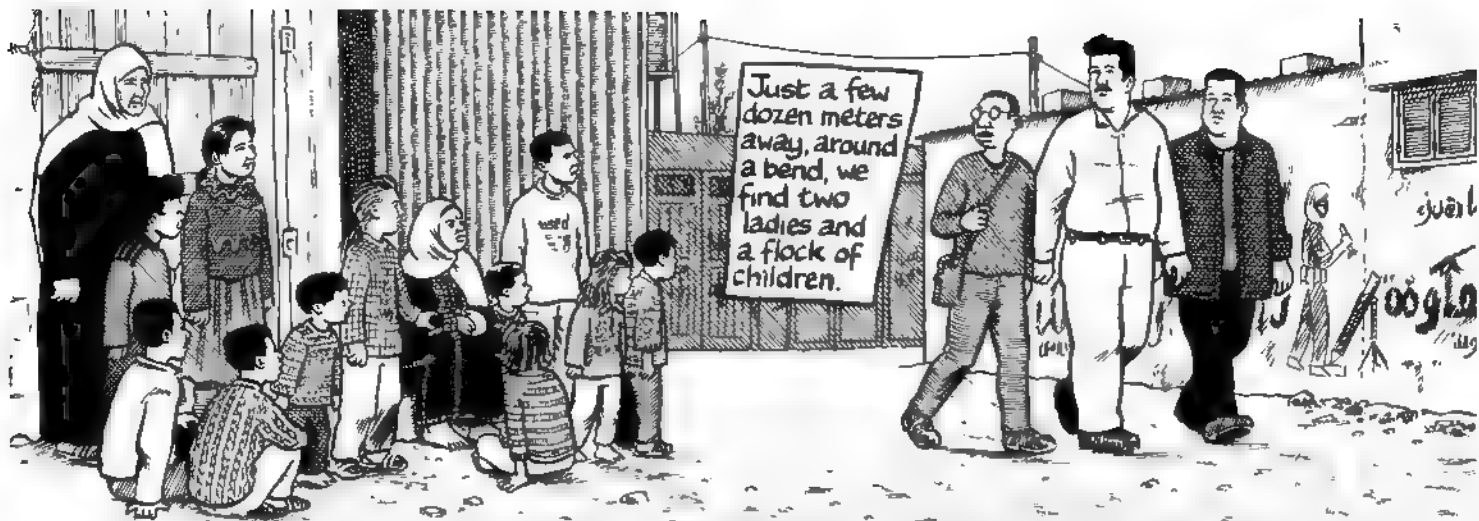
Israel claims these are the only reasons it has demolished hundreds of Rafah's dwellings.



The demolition of houses is an almost daily occurrence.







**YOU
CAN'T STOP
THEM! THERE'S
THE BLOOD OF
THE INTIFADA
IN THE
BOYS!**

**MY
OTHER
SON SHAKES
ALL NIGHT AND
HAS CONVUL-
SIONS.**

**HOW
AM I SUP-
POSED TO STAY
HOME AND COOK
WHEN MY KIDS
ARE ON THE
FIRING
LINE?**

**EITHER
GET RID OF
THE BLOCK AT
ONE GO, OR
STOP DO-
ING IT!**

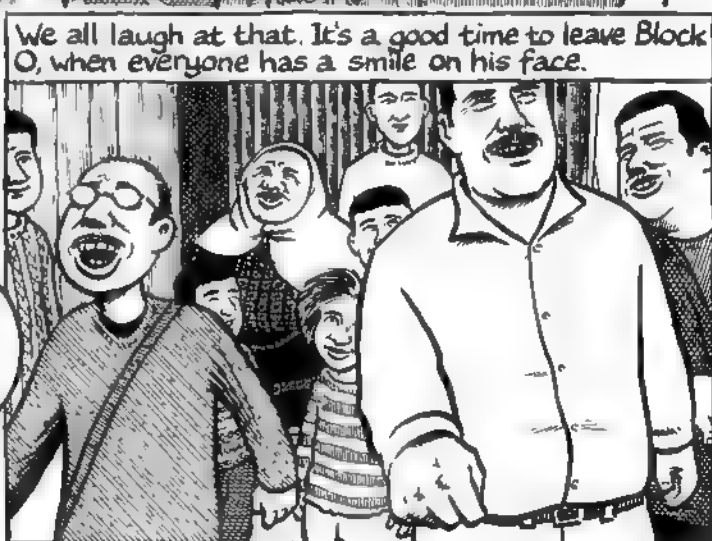
She motions
to the other
woman who
says that all
five of her
children
have been in-
jured in this
intifada.

One of
them
lost a
hand.

**WE SAY
THE BOYS WHO
HAVE BEEN KILLED
ARE MARTYRS, BUT
WHEN YOU'VE SEEN
YOUR SON CRIP-
PLED, THEN
WHAT?**

**WHEN
YOU SEE
YOUR SON WITH
ONE HAND CUT OFF
AND HE'S TRYING
TO PULL UP HIS
PANTS, YOU DIE
LITTLE BY
LITTLE.**

**AND
THEN WHEN
SOMEONE GOES
TO MAKE A SUI-
CIDE ATTACK, THE
WHOLE WORLD
TURNS UPSIDE-
DOWN!**



THE FALL OF RAFAH

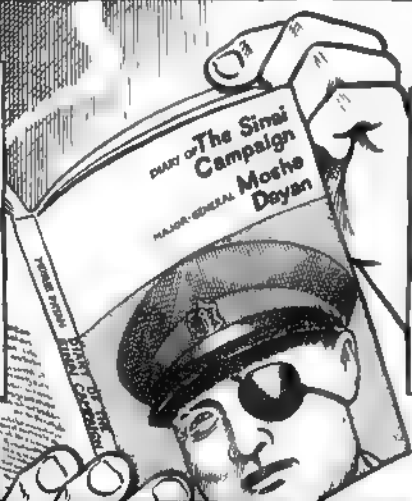
The demolition of Rafah's houses is the present-day white noise over which we are listening for the sounds of another time, 1956.

The distant voices of the conquerors, at least, still come through loud and clear.

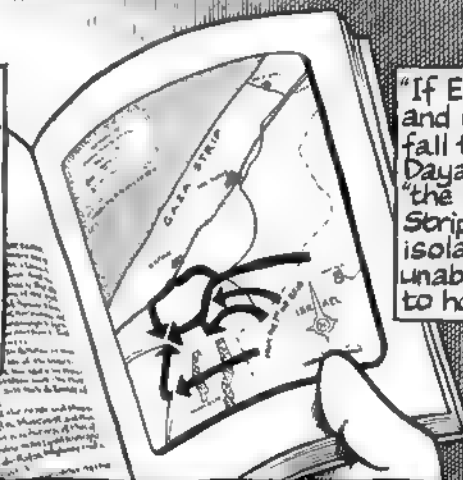


And so while the nighttime gunfire stammers and the armored vehicles rumble over the Philadelphia Route wasteland, Abed loses himself in my English-language translation of Moshe Dayan's wartime memoir, 'Diary of the Sinai Campaign.'

It's jammed with orders of battle, inventories of artillery pieces, and combat maps with attack arrows stabbing in various directions.



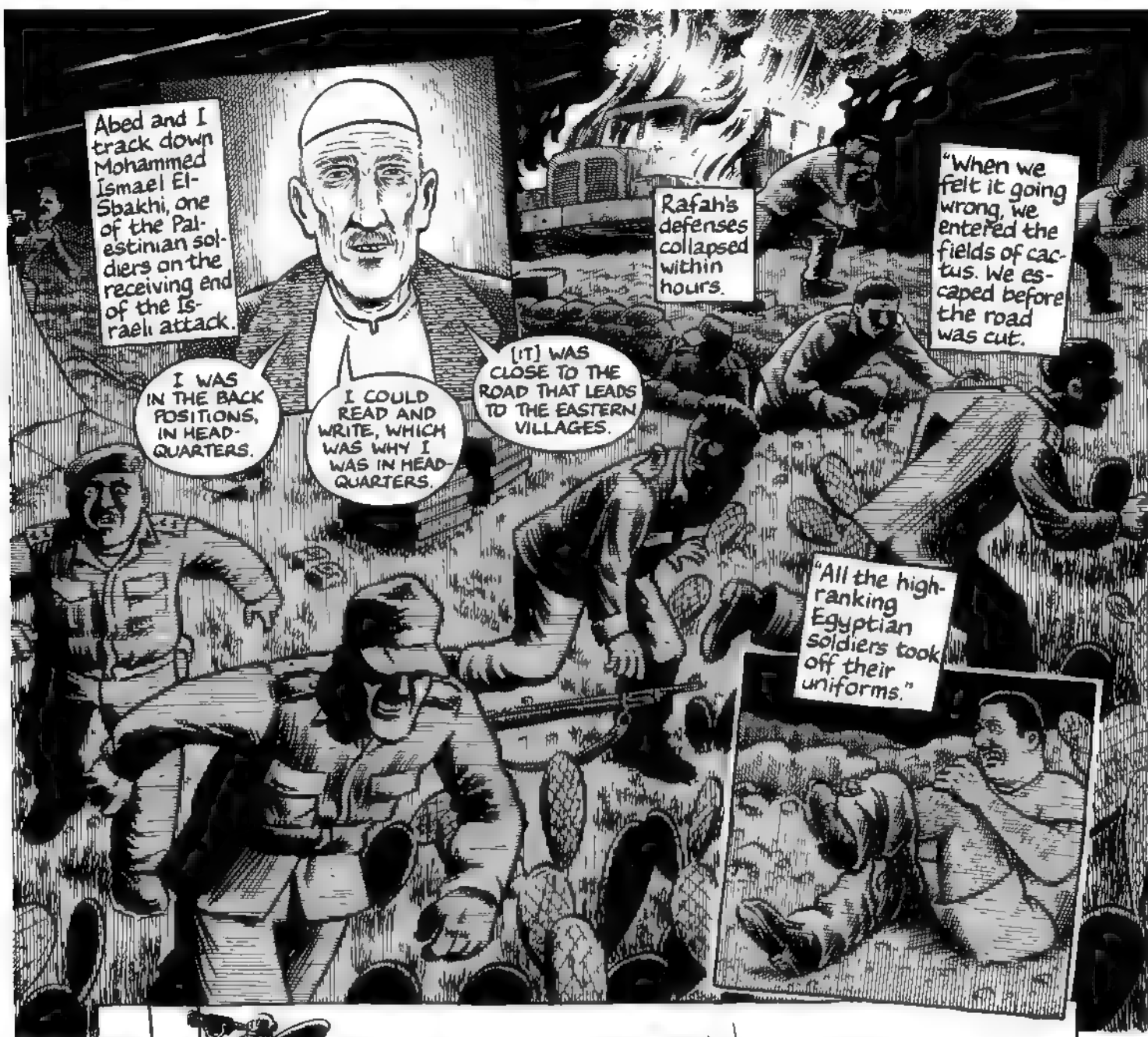
One of these maps, with no less than six thrusting arrows, represents the Israeli capture of the Rafah area.



"If El Arish and Rafah fall to us," Dayan wrote, "the Gaza Strip will be isolated and unable, alone, to hold out."

In fact, Dayan considered the attack on Rafah important enough to personally accompany the 1st Infantry Brigade's assault, which began in the early hours of November 1, 1956.





Abed and I track down Mohammed Ismael El-Spakhi, one of the Palestinian soldiers on the receiving end of the Israeli attack.

I WAS IN THE BACK POSITIONS, IN HEAD-QUARTERS.

I COULD READ AND WRITE, WHICH WAS WHY I WAS IN HEAD-QUARTERS.

[IT] WAS CLOSE TO THE ROAD THAT LEADS TO THE EASTERN VILLAGES.

Rafah's defenses collapsed within hours.

"When we felt it going wrong, we entered the fields of cactus. We escaped before the road was cut.

"All the high-ranking Egyptian soldiers took off their uniforms."



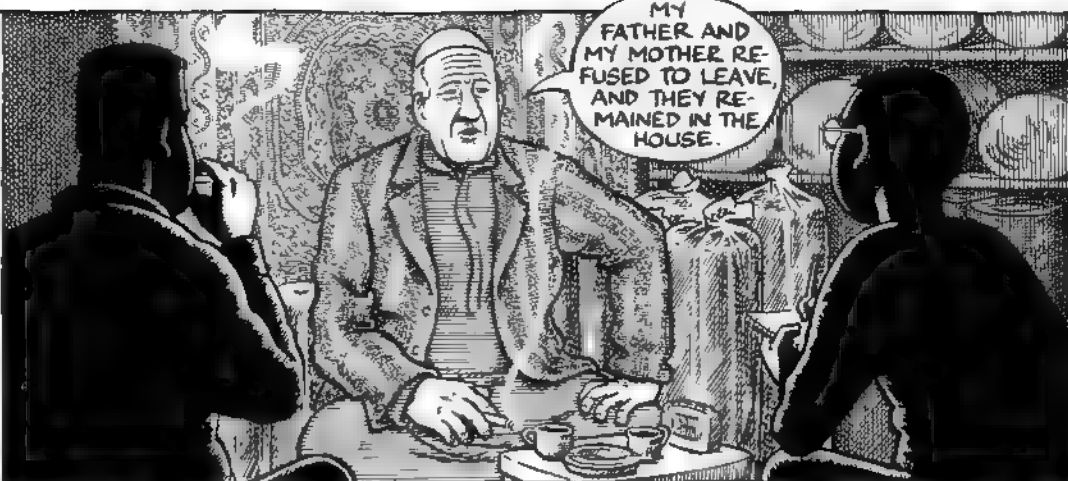
By mid-morning, Dayan was already on the way to his next objective.

He later wrote, "As soon as we left Rafah, the excitement and tension suddenly vanished, giving way to the same serenity I used to feel after a jump during my parachute days."



But those left in his dust felt anything but serene.

In the small warehouse in the back of his carpet shop on Sea Street, Mohammed Yousef Shaker Mousa remembers joining the thousands from Rafah who fled from the Israelis to the coast, where some continued on into Sinai.



MY FATHER AND MY MOTHER REFUSED TO LEAVE, AND THEY REMAINED IN THE HOUSE.



"[The Israelis] ran after the people up to the sea."

"They were searching for the soldiers, for the ones wearing uniforms..."

"With my eyes I saw six or seven people that they killed in the sandy area of Sinai."

"They were cowardly soldiers, but the Arabs were more cowardly."

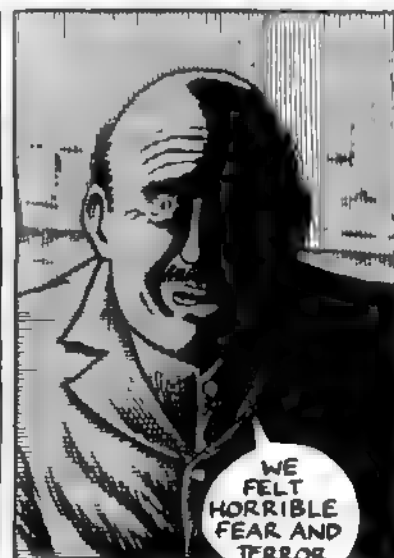
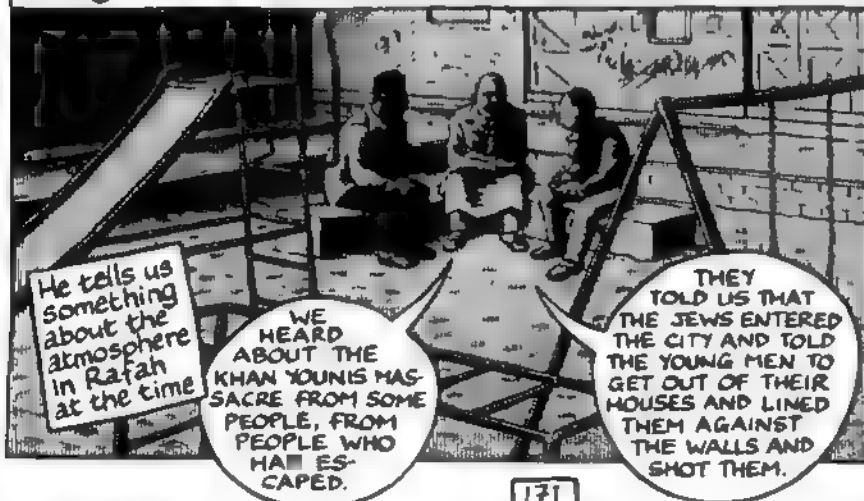




As an uneasy occupation settled in, Israeli troops took control of the only school in Rafah for local children, which in those days was referred to as the "official" or "government" school to distinguish it from the UNRWA schools for refugee kids. Constructed in the 1930s, the original building still stands and now serves as a preparatory and primary school for boys. Today it is commonly called the El-Ameeria School.



But before we take you into its fire, we sit shivering in a playground in Shaboura with a man who won't give his name and clearly does not want us to see where he lives.



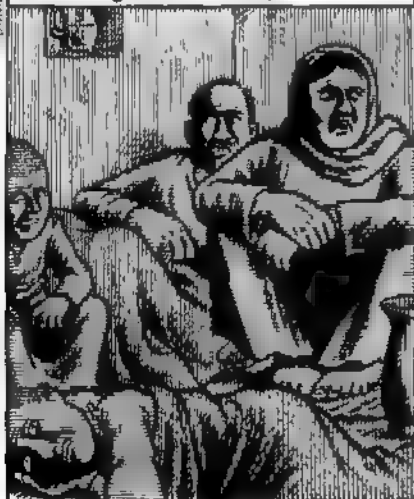
"The walls of our houses were very low, and some of the soldiers would look over the walls."

"When you went outside into the yard and saw them, you got scared and went back to your rooms."

"We turned off our lamps and lay down...In the night, no one would light his lamp."

"They gave only two hours daily, from eight to ten, for the people to leave their houses. The people went out quickly to get their food."

"About five minutes to ten...they would start shooting everywhere...shooting in the sky to frighten the people..."

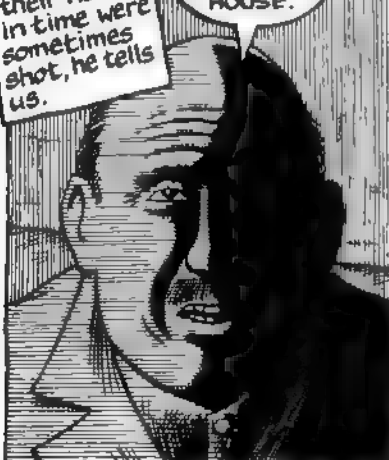


Those who had not reached their homes in time were sometimes shot, he tells us.

ONE PERSON WAS KILLED IN FRONT OF OUR HOUSE.

"He was shot in the back, and he began screaming and shouting, but no one could help him. I saw this with my eyes."

"And there weren't any ambulances at the time. The injured always bled until they died."



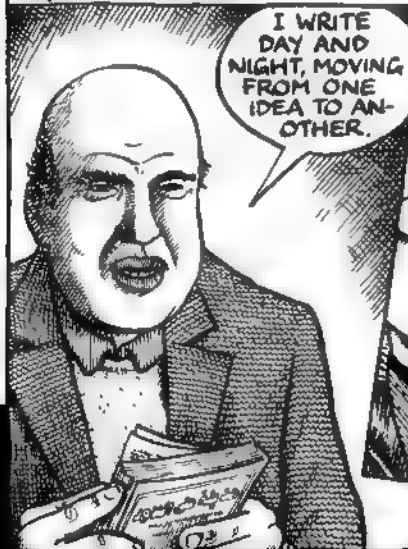


Rafah was cowed, but the Israelis had unfinished business there.



They wanted to seize Palestinian soldiers and any of the hated fedayeen who may have mixed in with the civilians.

Meet Owda Ayesh, who was six years old in '56. He's a school teacher now, and Rafah's unofficial chronicler.



I WRITE DAY AND NIGHT, MOVING FROM ONE IDEA TO ANOTHER.

A number of times I'm told.

OWDA AYESH INTERVIEWED ME ALREADY. EVERYTHING IS IN HIS BOOK.

Because Ayesh has beaten me to the punch. Long before I struck a claim to this episode, Ayesh lived it and then began mining it himself.



And his motivations trump my Gaza dillettantism.

Israel's hunt for Palestinian combatants cost him six relatives.

Rafah was the center of the fedayeen, says Ayesh, but according to his Arabic-language account, the Israeli search netted only one fedayee there, Ahmed Joudah, known as The Red.



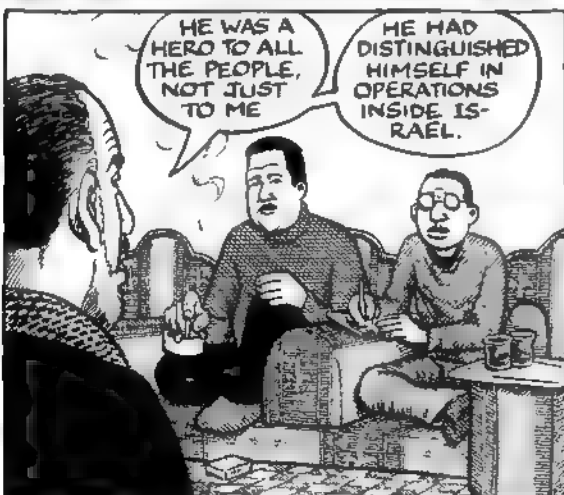
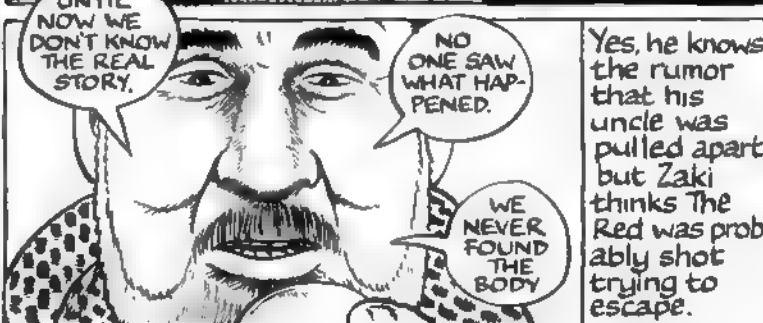
Ayesh claims the Israelis took The Red from his home, tied him to two jeeps, and pulled his body apart.



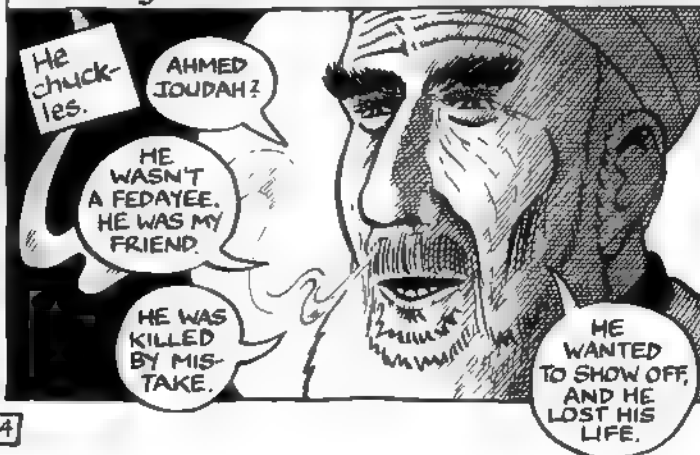
"Around the Isha prayer, the last prayer [of the day], the Jews came... He was in bed, lying down, wearing his pajamas."



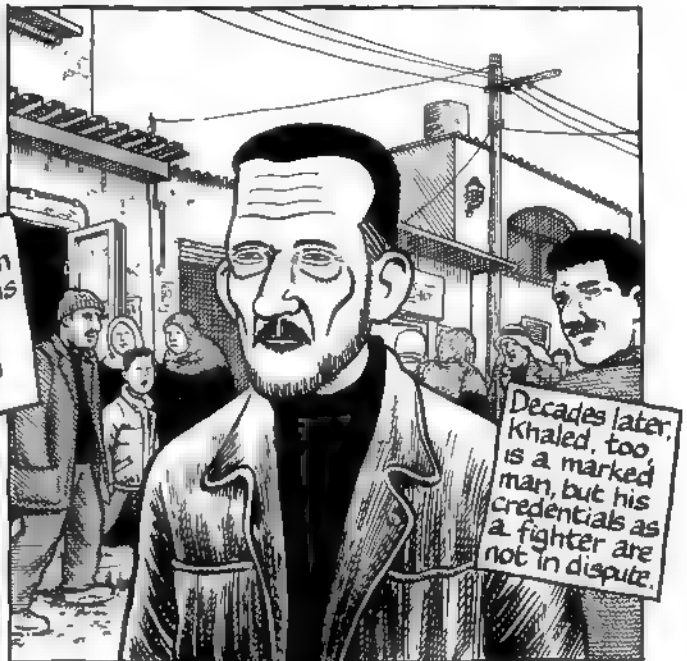
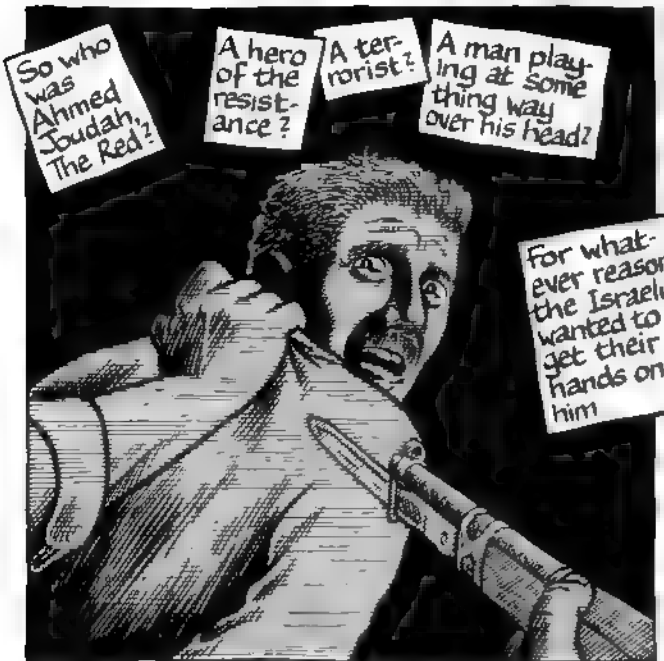
"We stayed inside. We were panicked, full of fright, because we'd heard what had happened in Khan Younis"



But remember the old fedayee in Khan Younis? He told me that all the fedayeen had escaped the Israeli dragnet in Gaza. So what about The Red?



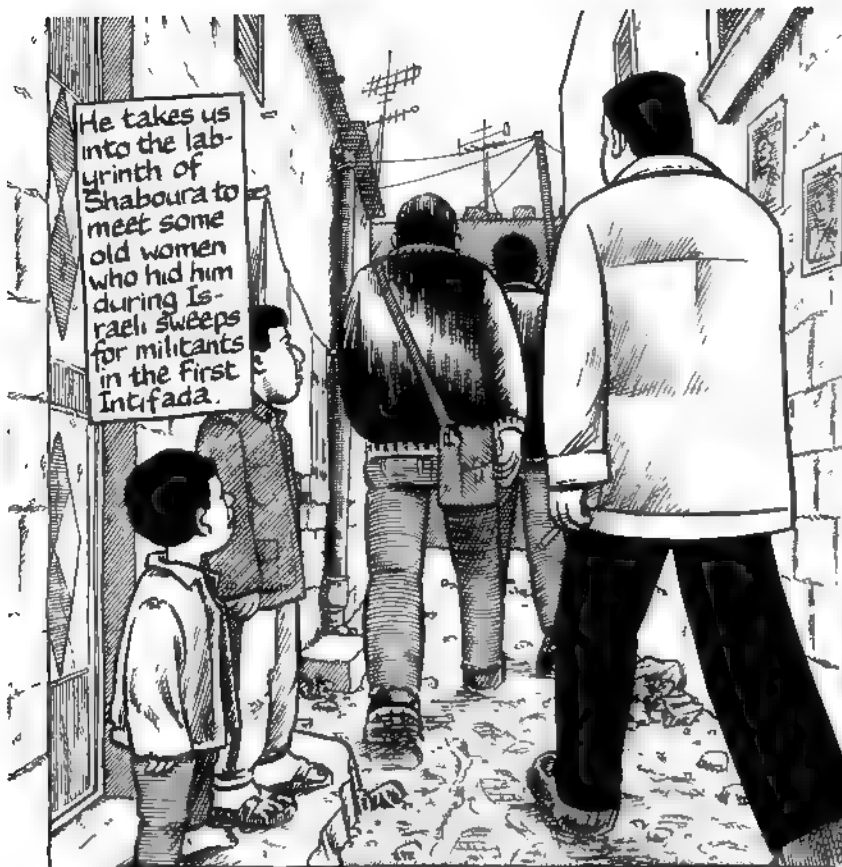
TAKING TOO LONG



One day Khaled leads us around, showing us places in Rafah where he fought the Israelis,

where he ducked a hail of bullets that killed his friend, another resistance fighter...





He takes us into the labyrinth of Shaboura to meet some old women who hid him during Israeli sweeps for militants in the First Intifada.

They are delighted to see him, and they reminisce about close calls and quick escapes.



One of the women seems particularly concerned with his well-being, with the chance the Israelis will kill him in a helicopter strike

YOU SHOULDN'T SPEND SO MUCH TIME WITH THE OTHER 'MUTARAD'.

DON'T STAY TOGETHER. SPREAD OUT.

DON'T BE IN THE SAME CAR.

I'VE SAID FAREWELL TO MANY FRIENDS



YOU SHOULD BE ABROAD

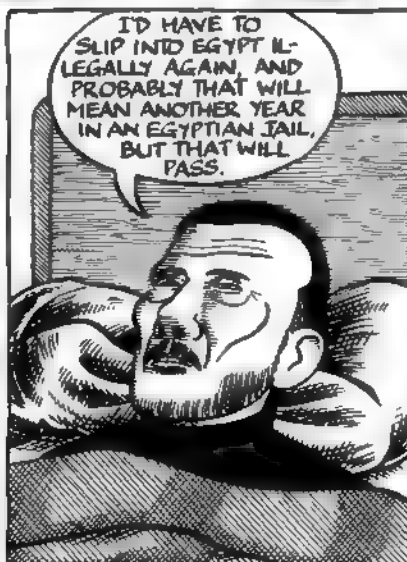
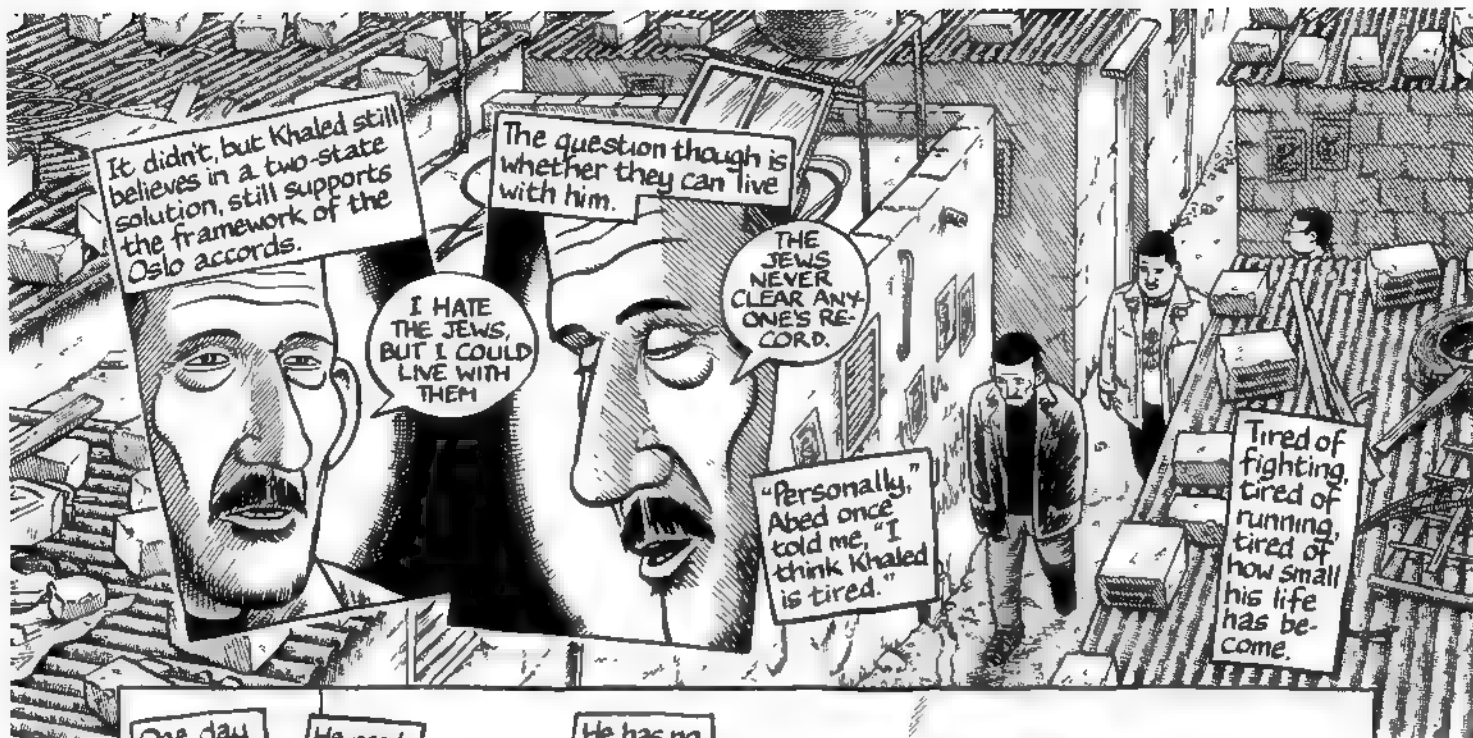
WHY DID YOU COME BACK?

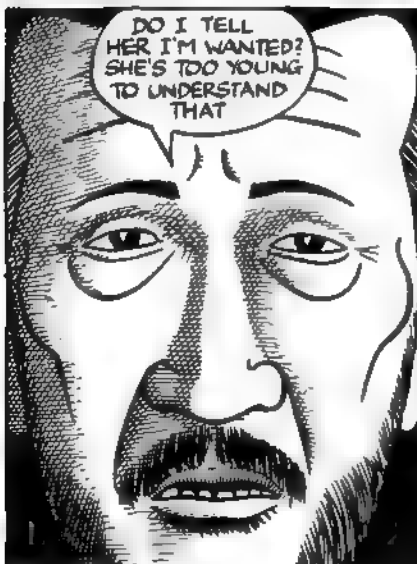
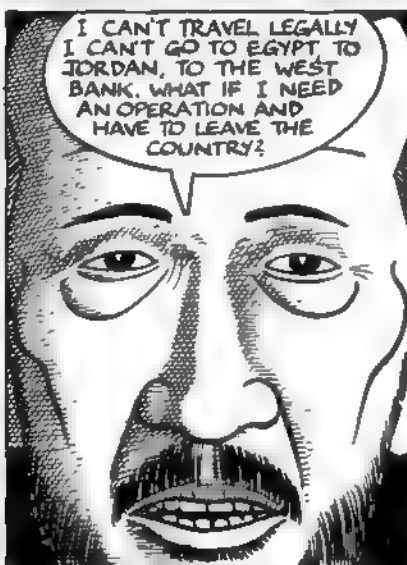
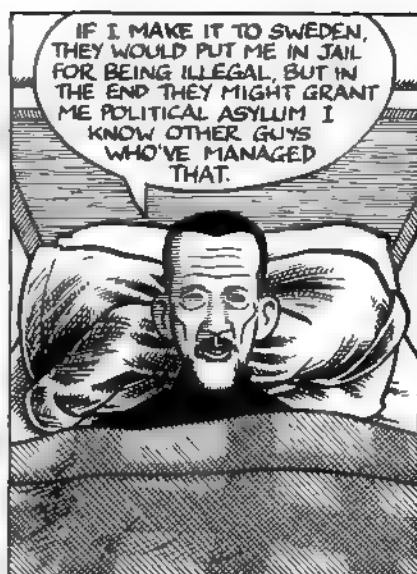
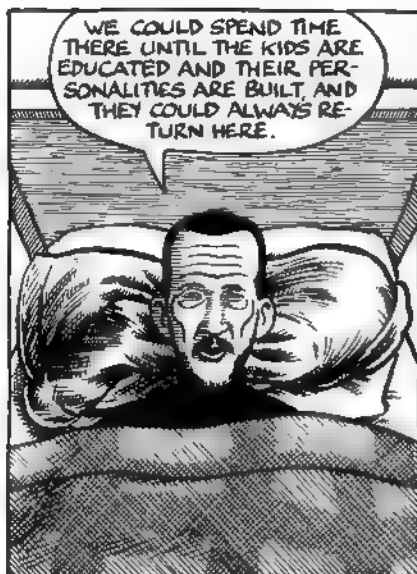


Why did he come back?

Because this is his home

and because he hoped the PLO's peace agreement with Israel meant an end to the fighting





They say it's a small world, and that's for sure.

ATTACK WEST OF BLOCK J

A week ago here in Rafah, I ran into Asim, a photographer I first met in Sarajevo.

Now I find him on noisy Sea Street getting off his cell phone

He's just heard that bulldozers are at work near Block J.

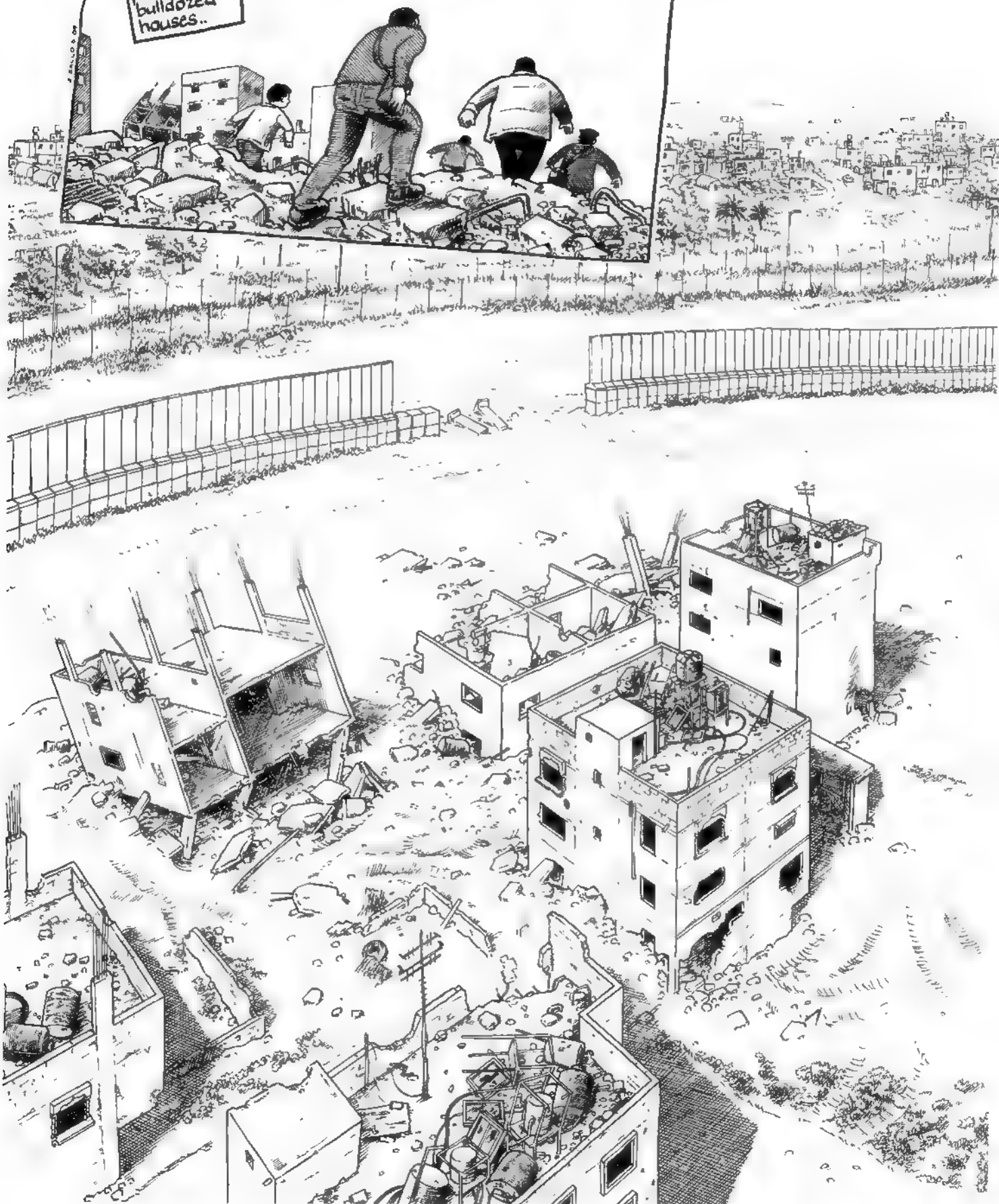
Probably we should be taking care of '56 business, Abed and I, but we trot after him toward the border area

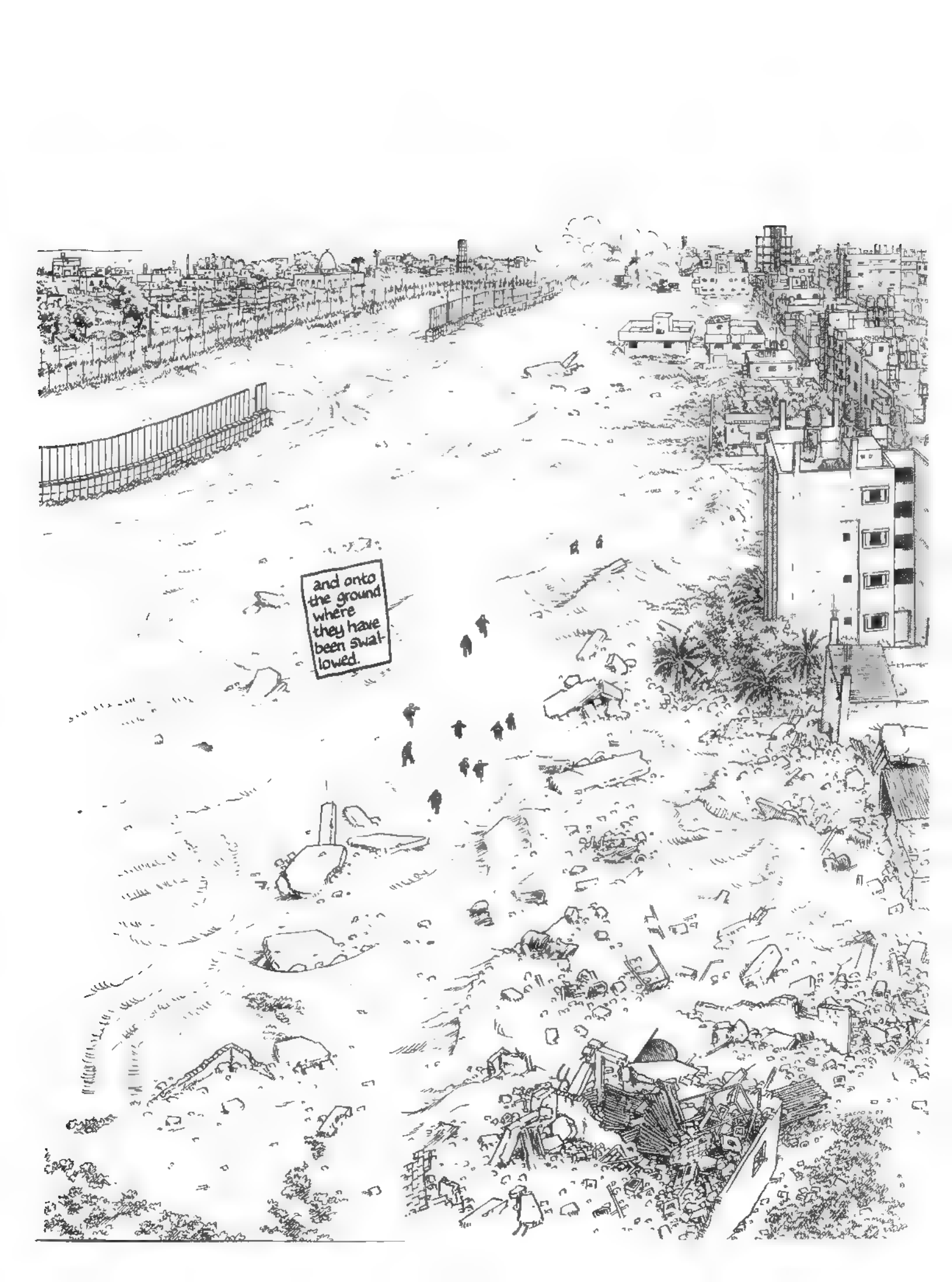
The sounds of Sea Street recede, and we come to an enormous quiet.

We're joined by a few Palestinian journalists and the usual gaggle of kids that we can't and don't bother to shake.

Perhaps we want their noise.

We head over
the lip of
debris from
previously
bulldozed
houses...





and onto
the ground
where
they have
been swal-
lowed.



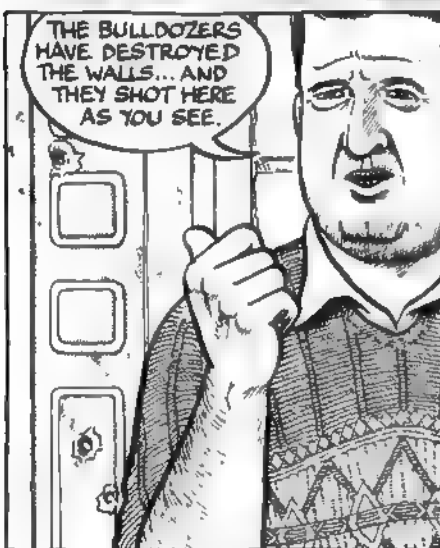
*AFV: ARMORED
FIGHTING VEHICLE



There we find a dazed man named Munir Abdelsalam Hassuna. His mother is with him.



The back of his house has just been attacked.



THE BULLDOZERS HAVE DESTROYED THE WALLS... AND THEY SHOT HERE AS YOU SEE.



WE WERE INSIDE THE HOME. WE LEFT IT JUST NOW.

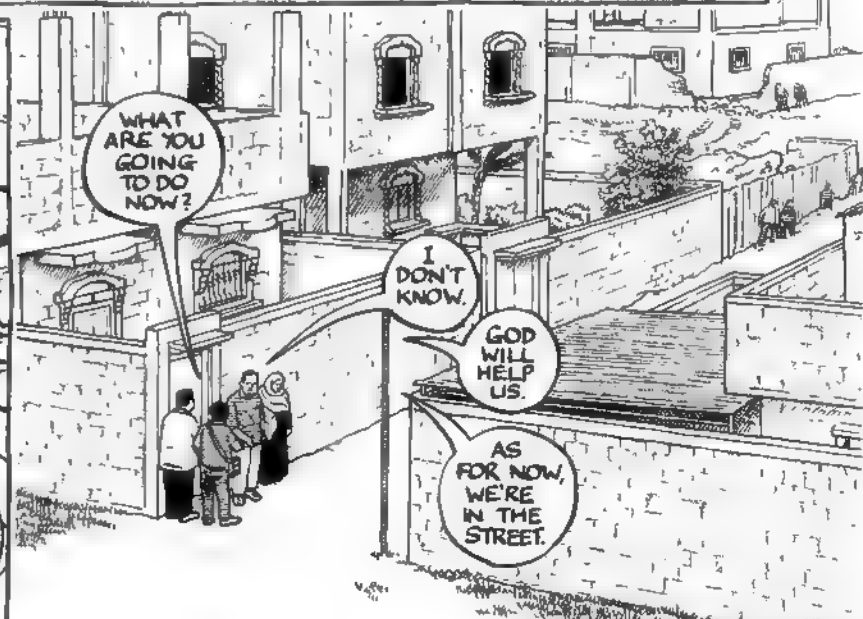


DID THE ISRAELIS GIVE YOU WARNING?

He thinks I'm joking.

NO.

SUDDENLY WE FOUND BULLETS COMING INTO OUR ROOM.



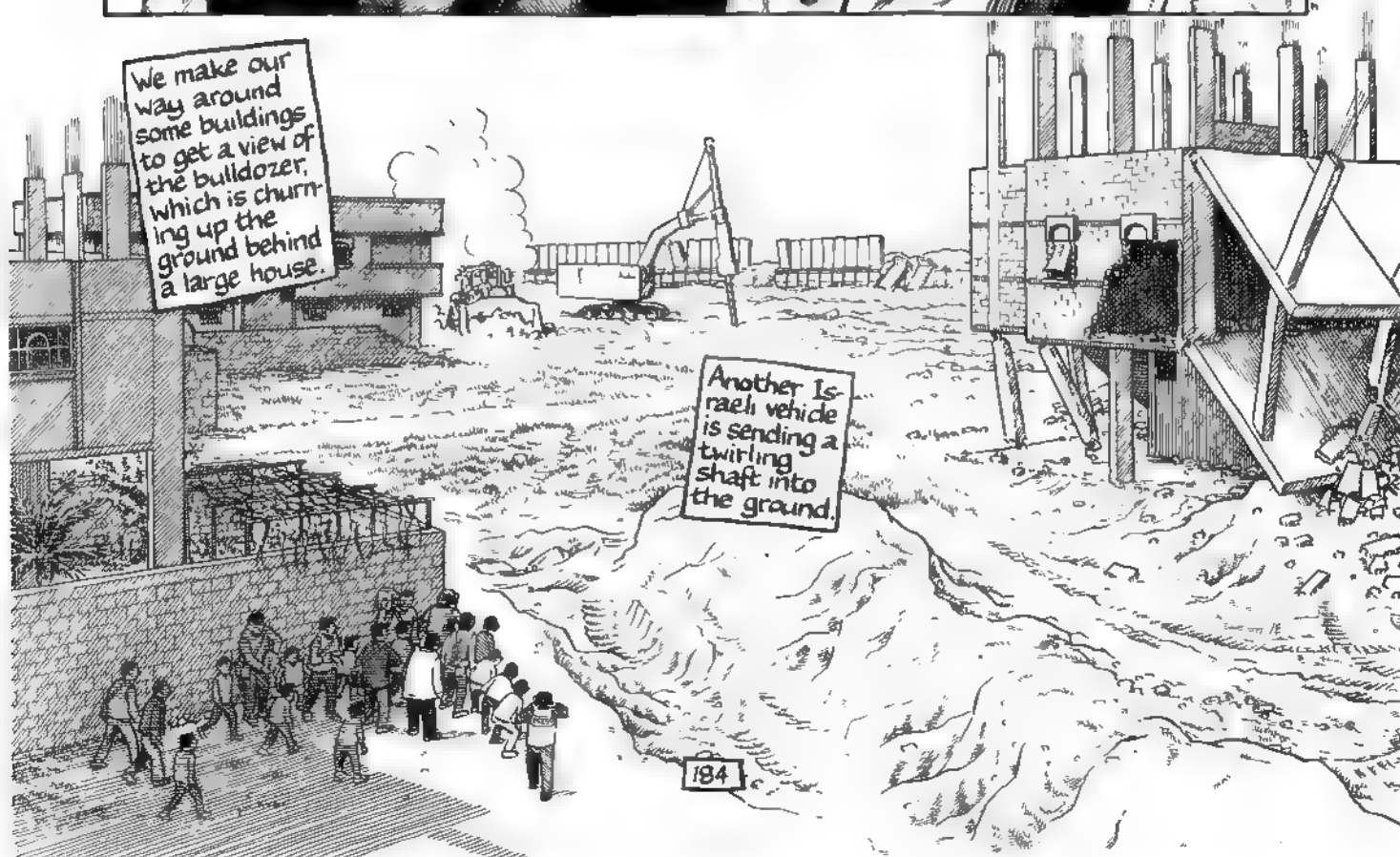
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO NOW?

I DON'T KNOW.

GOD WILL HELP US.

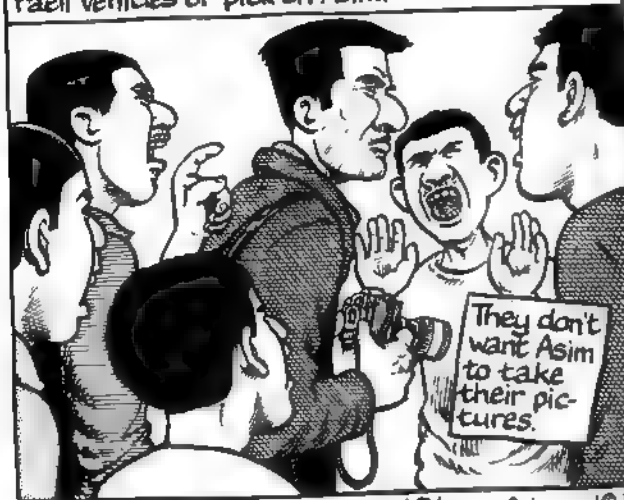
AS FOR NOW, WE'RE IN THE STREET.

J. SACCO & CHAPMAN





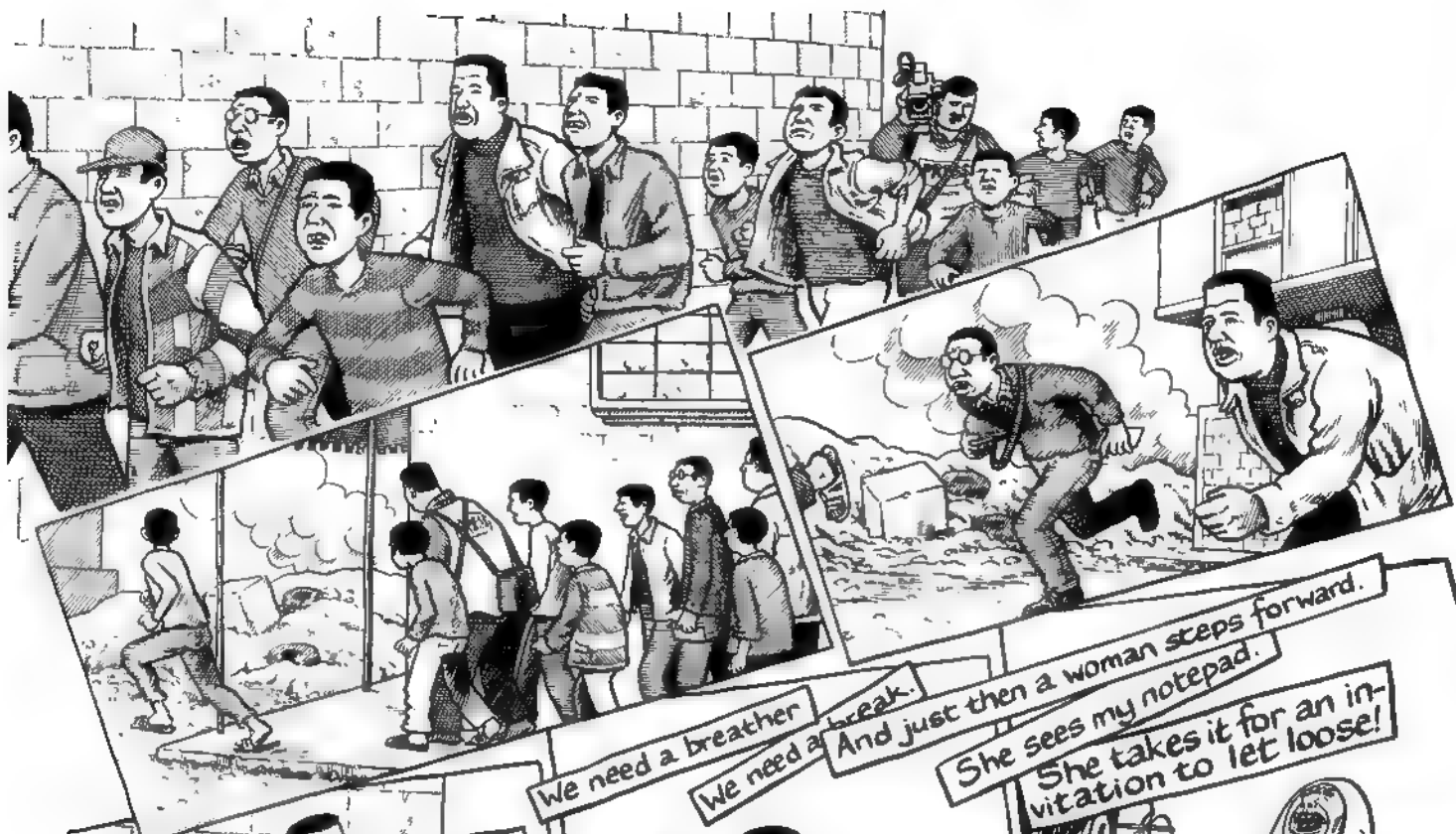
Now they can't decide whether to watch the Israeli vehicles or pick on Asim.



When they tire of bugging him, they turn to me.







We need a breather

We need a break.

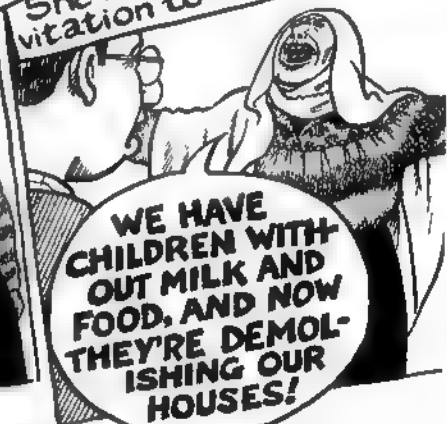
And just then a woman steps forward.

She sees my notepad.

She takes it for an invitation to let loose!



whew



WE HAVE CHILDREN WITH OUT MILK AND FOOD, AND NOW THEY'RE DEMOLISHING OUR HOUSES!



THEY'RE NOT HUMAN! THEY'RE ANIMALS!

HITLER DIDN'T DO THIS TO THEM!

HITLER DIDN'T EXILE THEM FROM THEIR LAND!

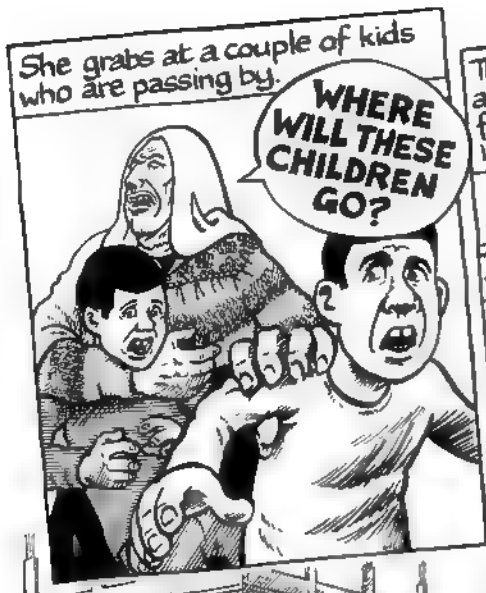
HITLER DIDN'T DEMOLISH THEIR HOMES!



I ASK GOD TO MAKE THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL AND THE CHILDREN OF AMERICA LIKE US—



OR-PHANS!

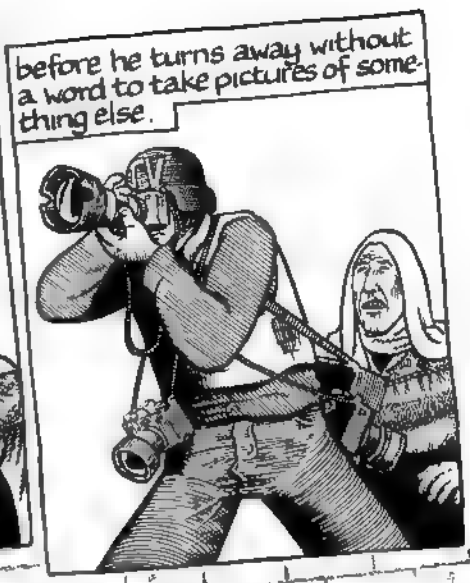


She grabs at a couple of kids who are passing by.

WHERE WILL THESE CHILDREN GO?



They squirm out of her grasp, and now a photographer steps forward and his camera whirrs in her face for ten seconds...



before he turns away without a word to take pictures of something else.



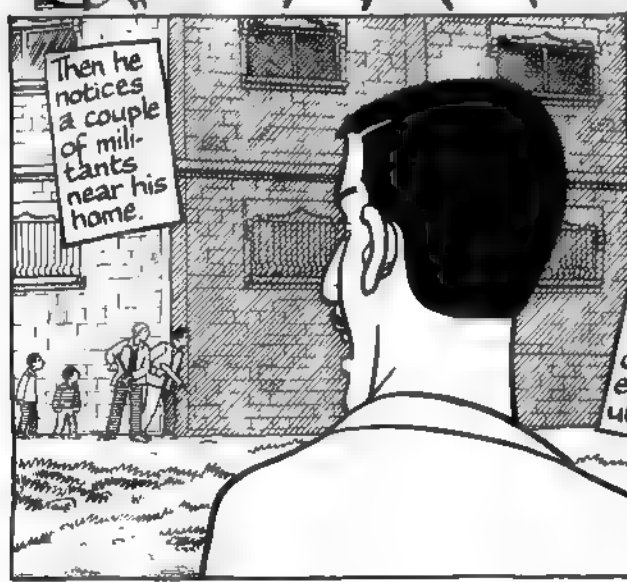
But now another local resident shows up.

WHY ARE YOU TAKING PICTURES?

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO PHOTOGRAPH?

THE HOUSES?

I'LL HOLD YOU RESPONSIBLE IF I SEE MY HOUSE ON T.V.!



Then he notices a couple of militants near his home.

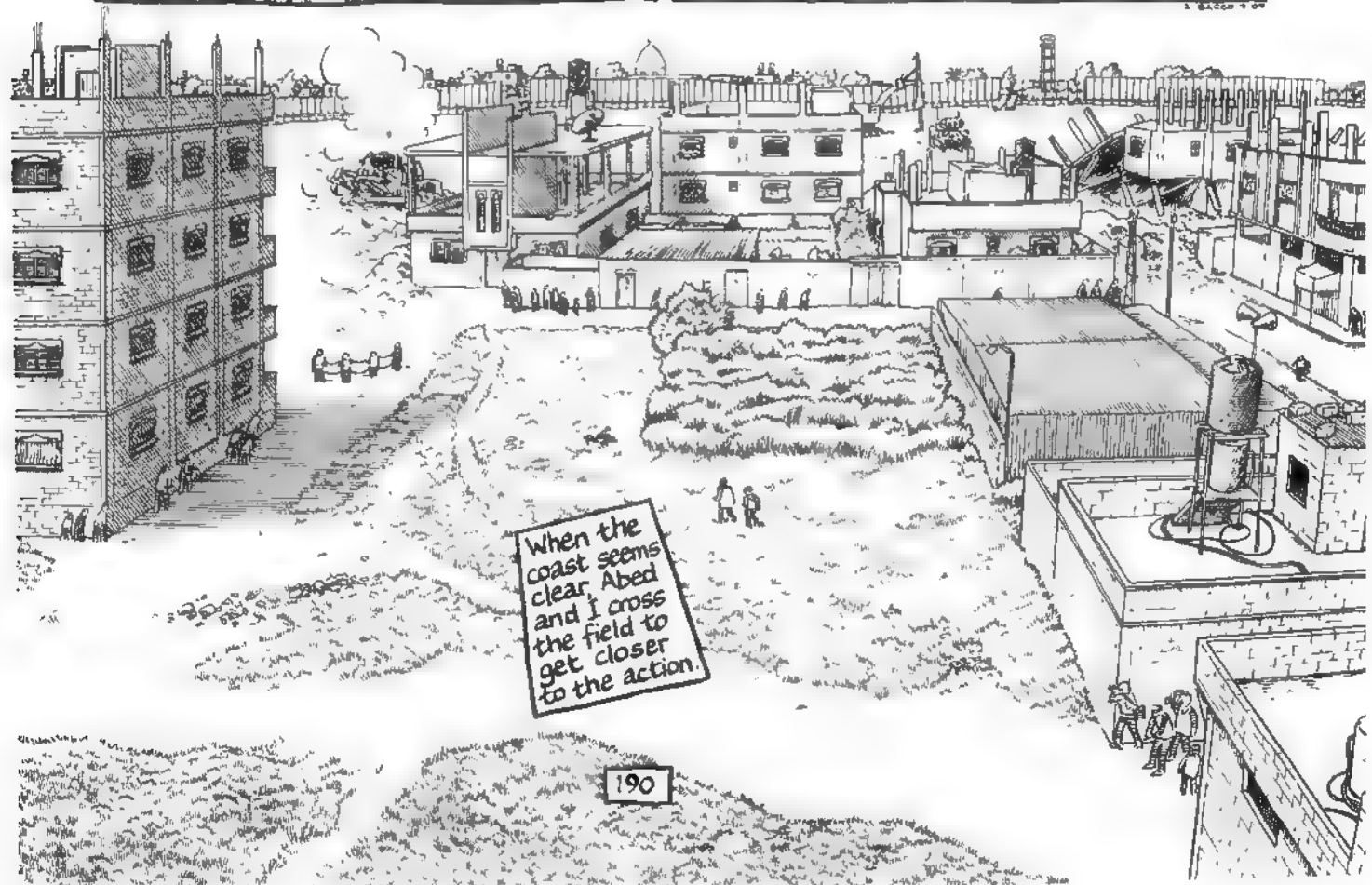
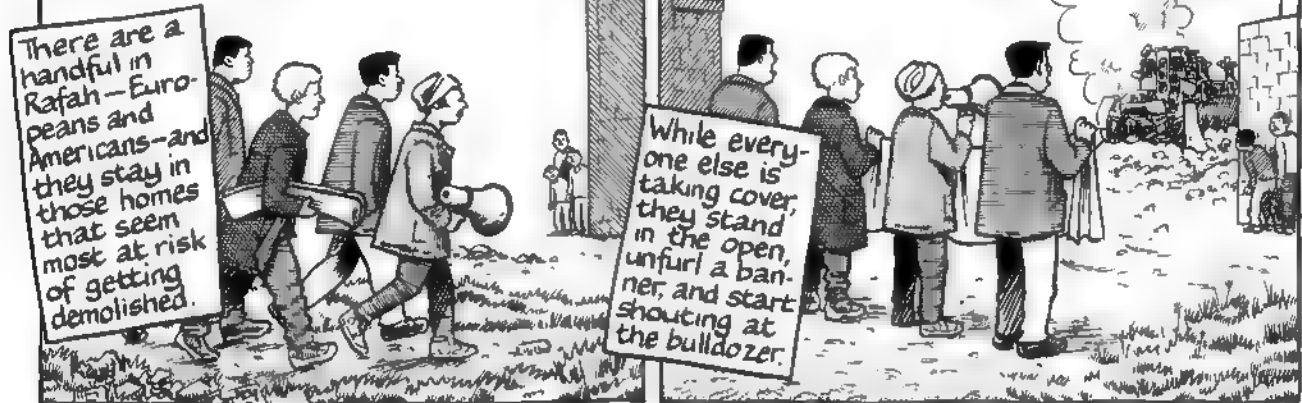


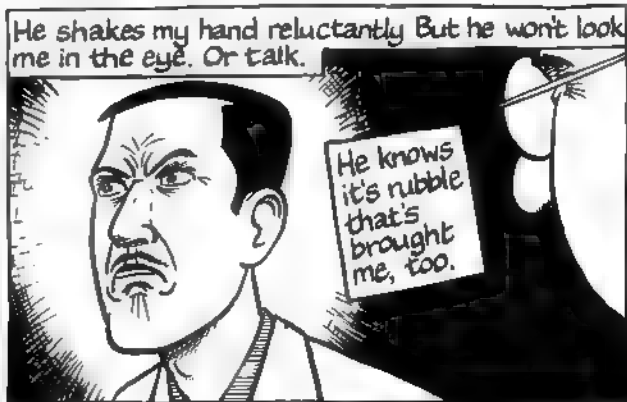
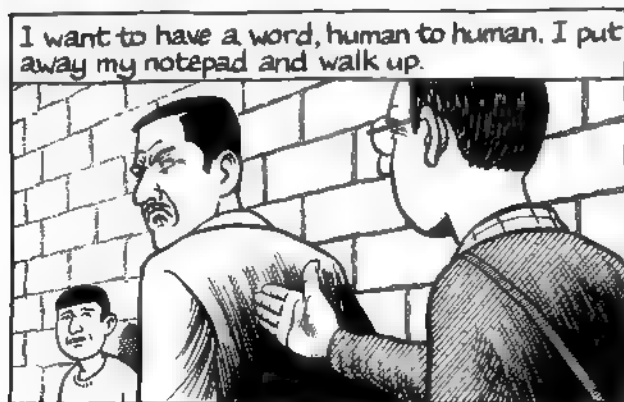
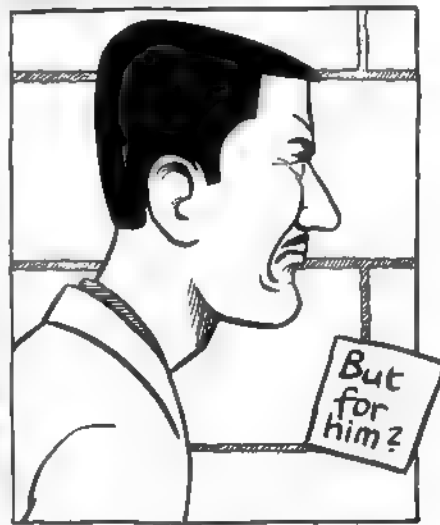
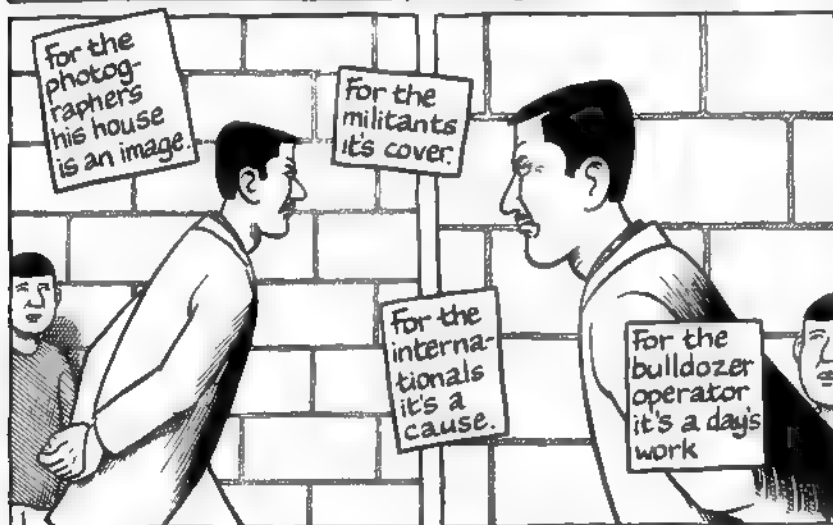
The man doesn't give a damn about the AFV, which is sending out rounds every minute or two.

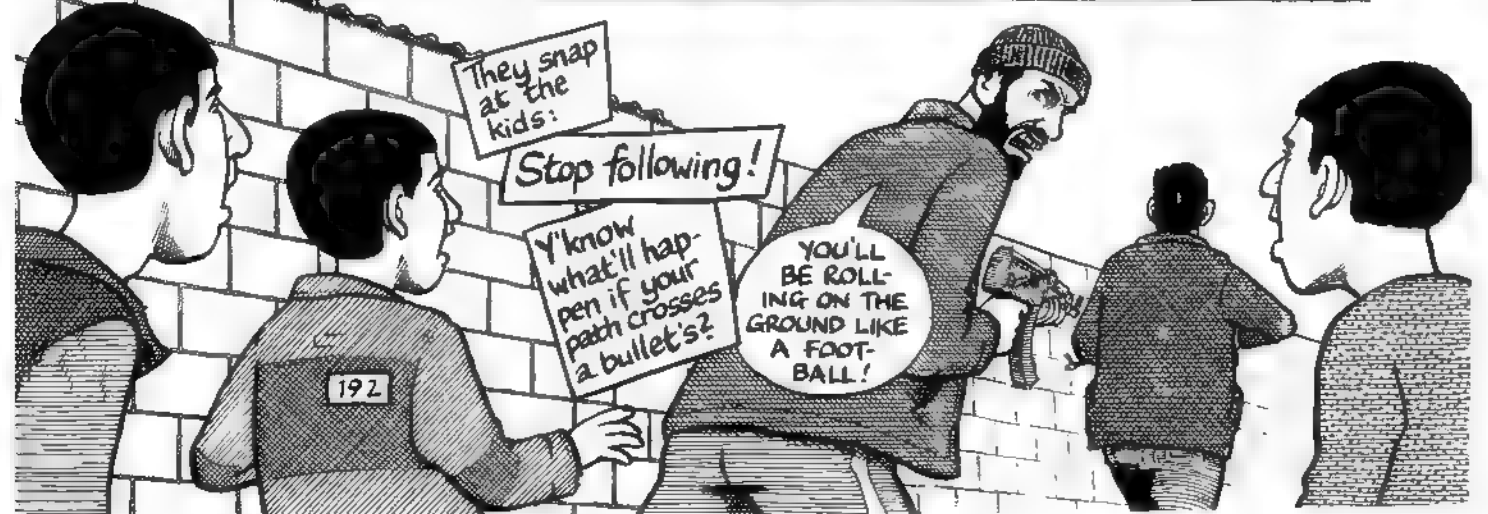
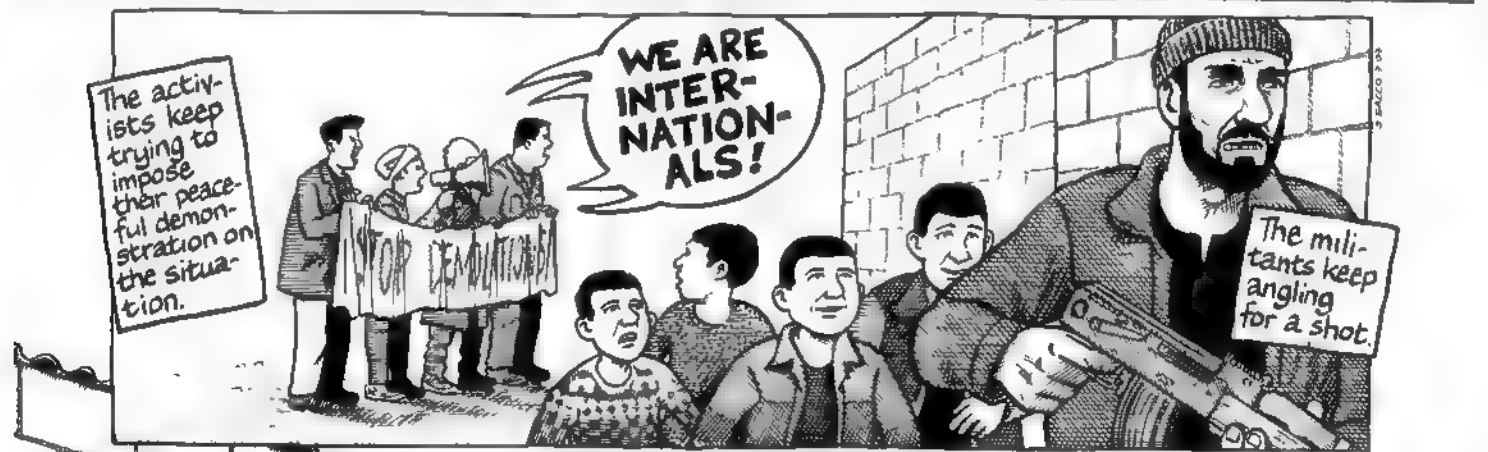
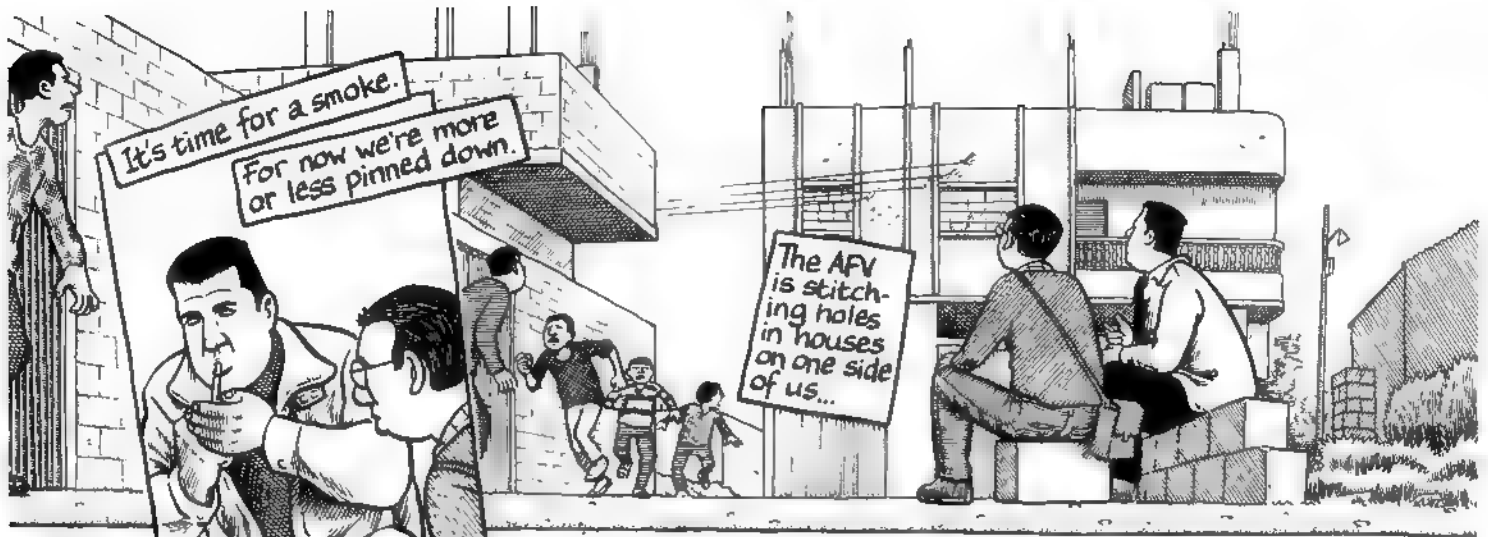
He strides across an open area toward the fighters.

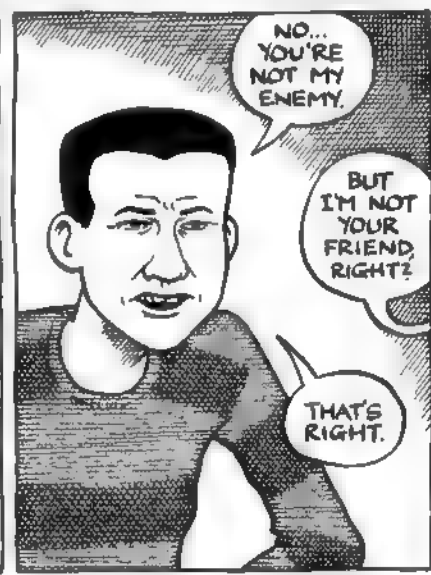
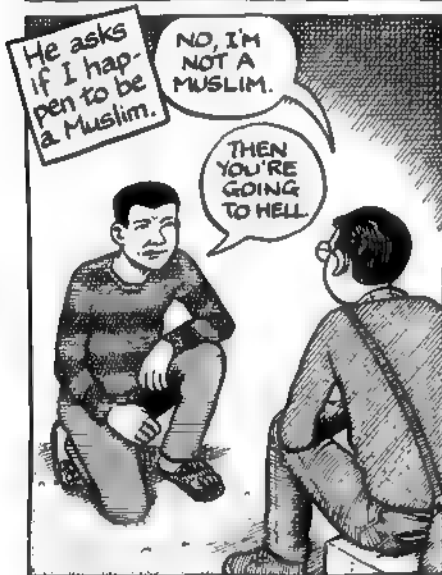
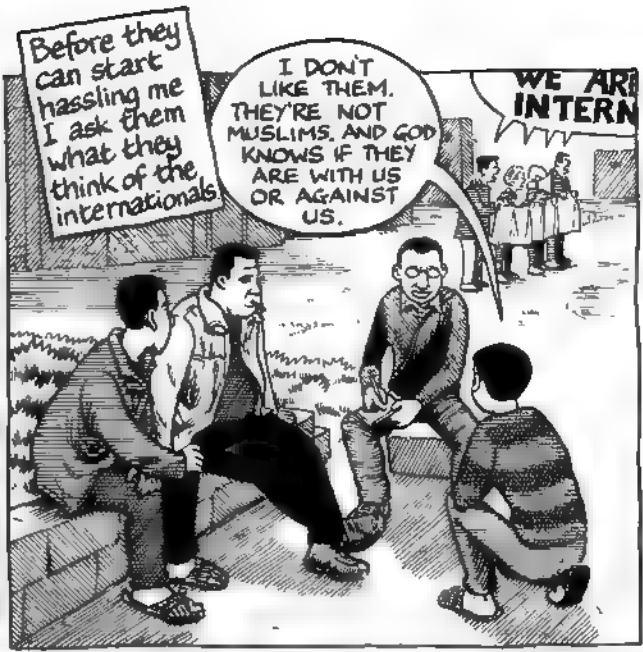


And now the party is joined by a new group, foreign activists with the International Solidarity Movement.











ASHRAF

Early the next day we were heading back to the site of the Israeli attack when we were stopped by a shout of recognition.

We've run into one of Abed's long-lost pals.

A loud greeting!

Kisses on this and that cheek!

And bear hugs!



Then Abed endures an ear-bashing.

Why haven't you stayed in touch?

Your behavior is shameful!

You don't know I'm married?

That I have a daughter?



I've seen this scenario repeated half a dozen times in Rafah, where Abed, apparently, has lost touch with some old friends.

This one's name is Ashraf.

He teaches English in Khan Younis.



Abed explains that we're on our way to check on Munir, the man whose home was damaged yesterday.

MY HOME WAS DAMAGED, TOO.

In fact, it turns out Ashraf's house was the very one we saw being crashed into by the bulldozer.

I'M GOING THERE NOW MYSELF.



Abed and Ashraf do some catching up on our way to Munir's.



Munir invites us in.

We greet his mother



THE SONS OF DOGS

THEY'VE DESTROYED IT.

Well, not quite. The master bedroom has taken some large caliber rounds, and the bathroom wall has been cracked open by the bulldozer.



Most of the damage is around back where rubble from previously destroyed houses has been pushed against and broken the wall.



Munir says he's been hanging on to his house despite the constant Israeli operations.

His family has been sleeping in the rooms which don't face the Philadelphia Route to put some walls between them and Israeli gunfire.

A neighbor encourages him to continue holding out.

But for Munir this is the end of the line.

I'LL LOOK FOR A NEW HOME AND RENT

I'VE BEEN UNEMPLOYED A LONG TIME

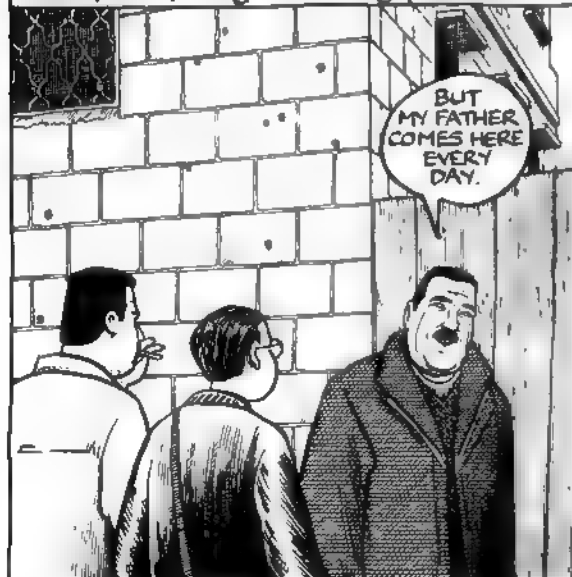
I'LL GET LOANS TILL UNRWA PROVIDES ME WITH FUNDS

WE'LL MOVE THE FURNITURE OUT AND LEAVE IT WITH OUR NEIGHBORS.

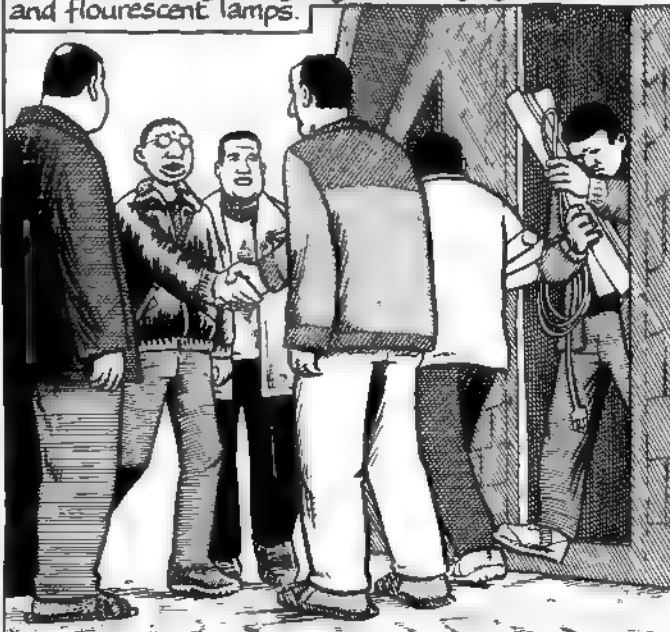


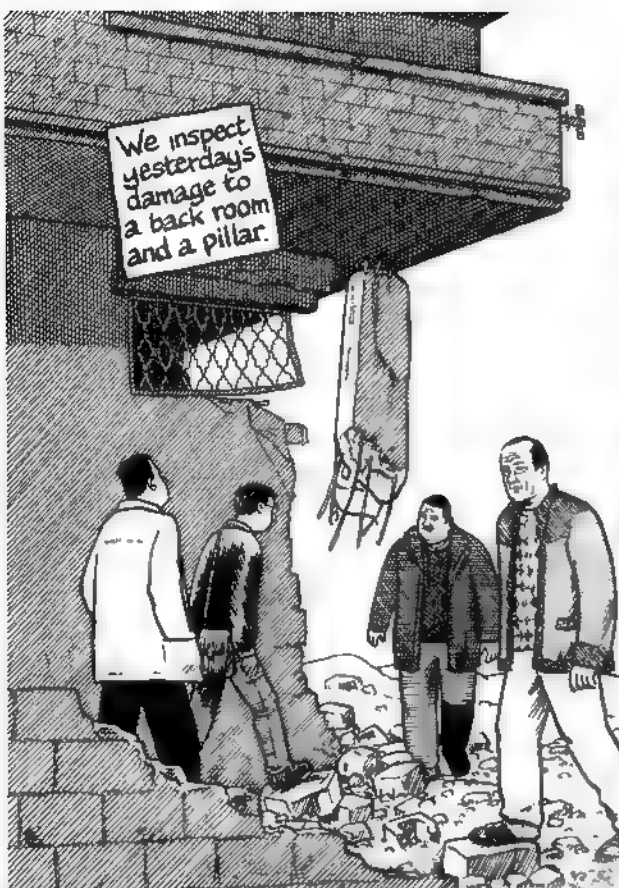


Israeli bullets started striking the house soon after the intifada began, Ashraf says. He and his wife left and rented in Block J. The rest of the family eventually followed.

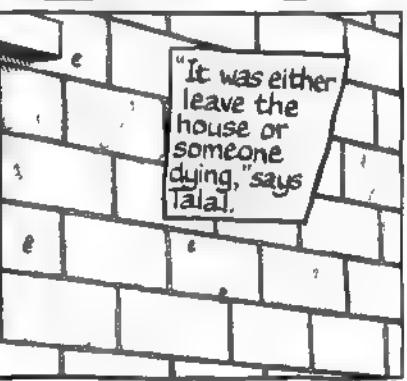


We meet his father, Talal, at the side entrance. His sons are coming and going, removing light fixtures and fluorescent lamps.

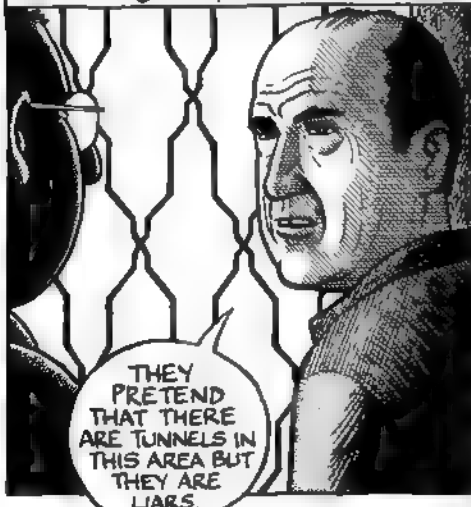




Talal is a building contractor and he built this house himself. One floor is completely finished. His family paid bit by bit for each new addition, each new door, each new window.



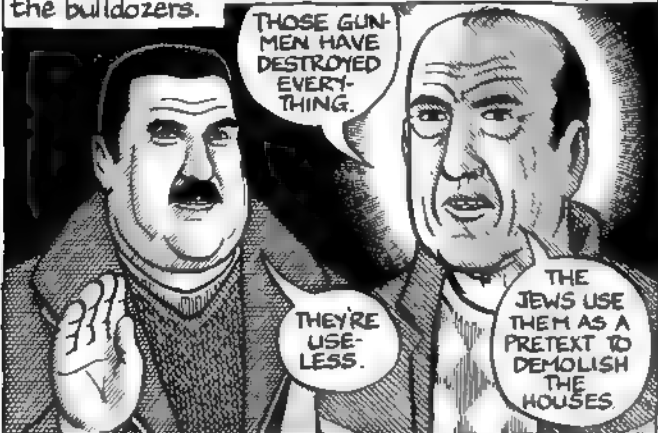
I ask about the smuggling tunnels. Their destruction is the main reason the IDF says it operates in this area.



IS ALL THIS AREA FULL OF TUNNELS?



I ask about the militants I saw yesterday. Do they think their actions are effective resistance against the bulldozers.



Yesterday, Talal says, he had a long argument with some militants before they moved away from his home.

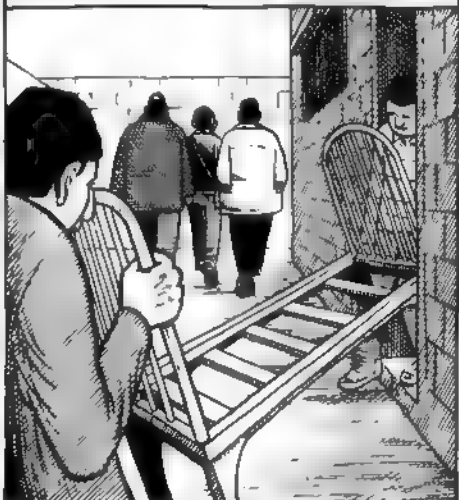
I ask if they intend to repair the pillar.



Ashraf gives us a short tour of the unfinished rooms that make up the second floor



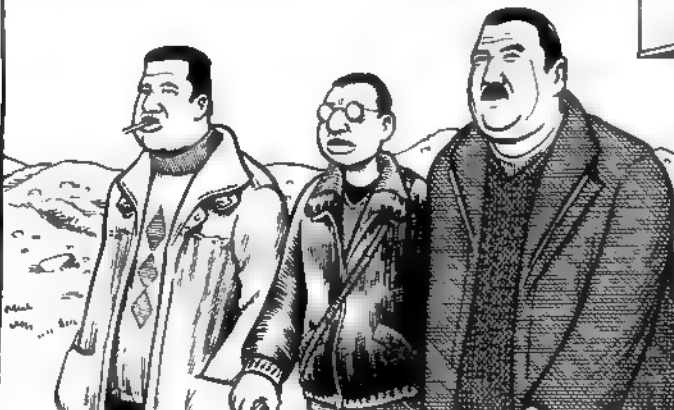
As we leave, two young men negotiate a bed frame out the door



Yesterday was the first time Ashraf's house and Munir's were hit by a bulldozer.

Both houses received minor damage, essentially a grazing.

But perhaps this was a message from the IDF.



TIME MANAGEMENT

Every week or so, Abed and I stop by the neighborhood confectionary to stock up on pastries, especially the honey-drenched variety that so well compliment our morning-noon-and-night coffee fixes.

The kid behind the counter has seen me in here a bunch of times. Finally, he asks what's up?

Abed, good fellow, explains my So project once again.

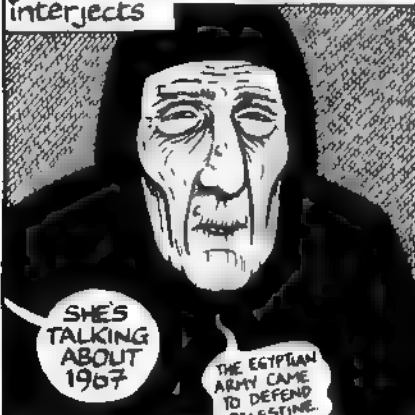
The kid is not impressed

FORGET THE PAST. WHAT ABOUT NOW?

"One day, I tell him, '50 years from now, they'll forget about you, too.'"



She tells us about Egyptian soldiers killed in the schoolyard, but her daughter-in-law interjects



Her grandson tries to keep her focused



Her tower of memories has collapsed. She gropes around to offer us a piece of her rubble.



But she's referring to one of her sons, killed during an Israeli raid in 1954.

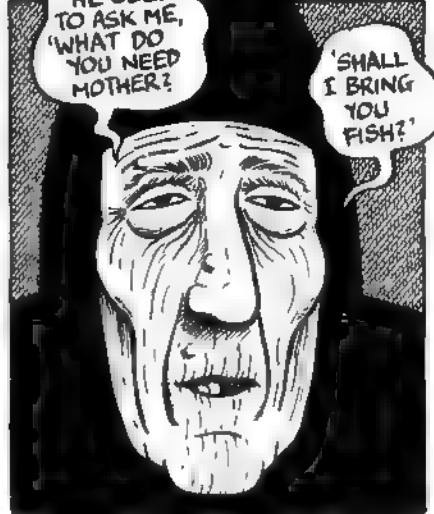


I SAID, 'FOR GOD'S SAKE LET ME SEE HIM'

THEY REFUSED TO LET ME SEE MY SON



HE USED TO ASK ME, 'WHAT DO YOU NEED MOTHER?'



'SHALL I BRING YOU FISH?'

If other old-timers are sharper, they might have just as little to offer. We're often referred to this one or that one,



but this one wasn't even in Rafah during the period in question...



and that one was hiding in the dunes and didn't see a thing.

Eventually, worn out by fruitless chases to Rafah's far corners, Abed and I screen potential subjects whenever possible.

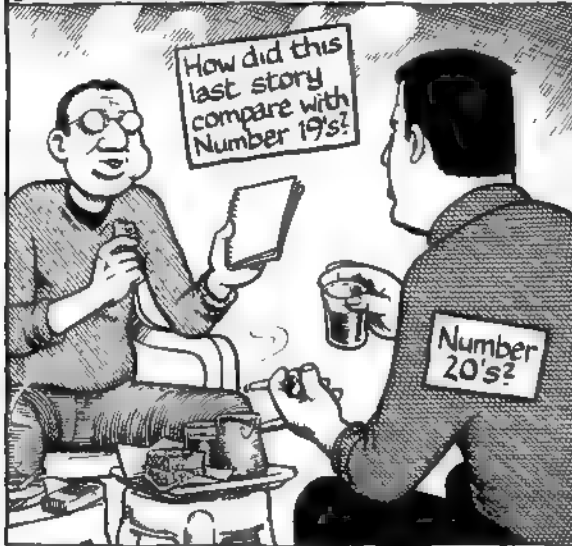
YES, COME IN, COME IN.

Nothing doing!

Before someone puts the kettle on and we're trapped for another half hour, we require a quickie synopsis of your story here at the threshold.



At home Abed and I drink coffee and eat those honey-drenched pastries while we go over the interviews.



Speaking of Number 20— and, by the way, I've numbered all the interviewees because I can hardly keep anyone's name straight— what did you think of his story?

ABOUT HIS FRIENDS BEING KILLED?

The more we hear, the more we fill in our picture of that day in '56, the more critical we become of each tale we hear.

I THINK HE'S EXAGGERATING.

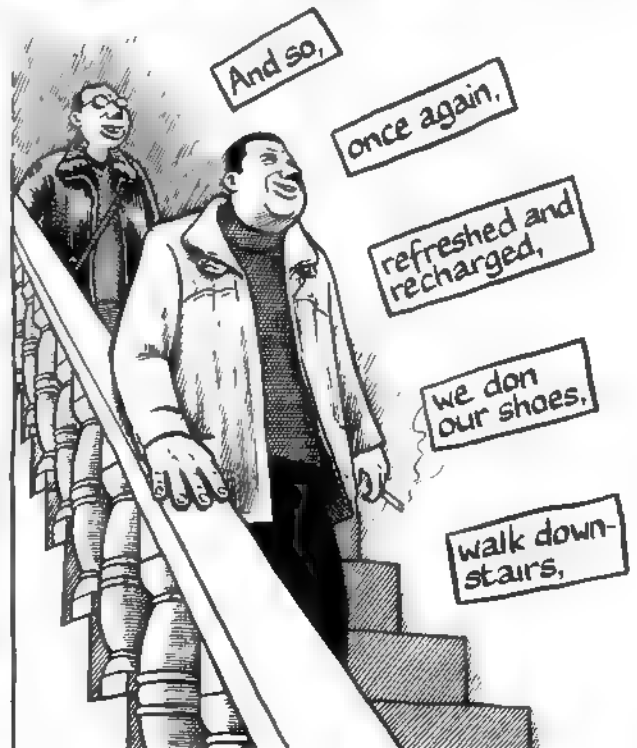
Abed is getting as sucked into this as I am.

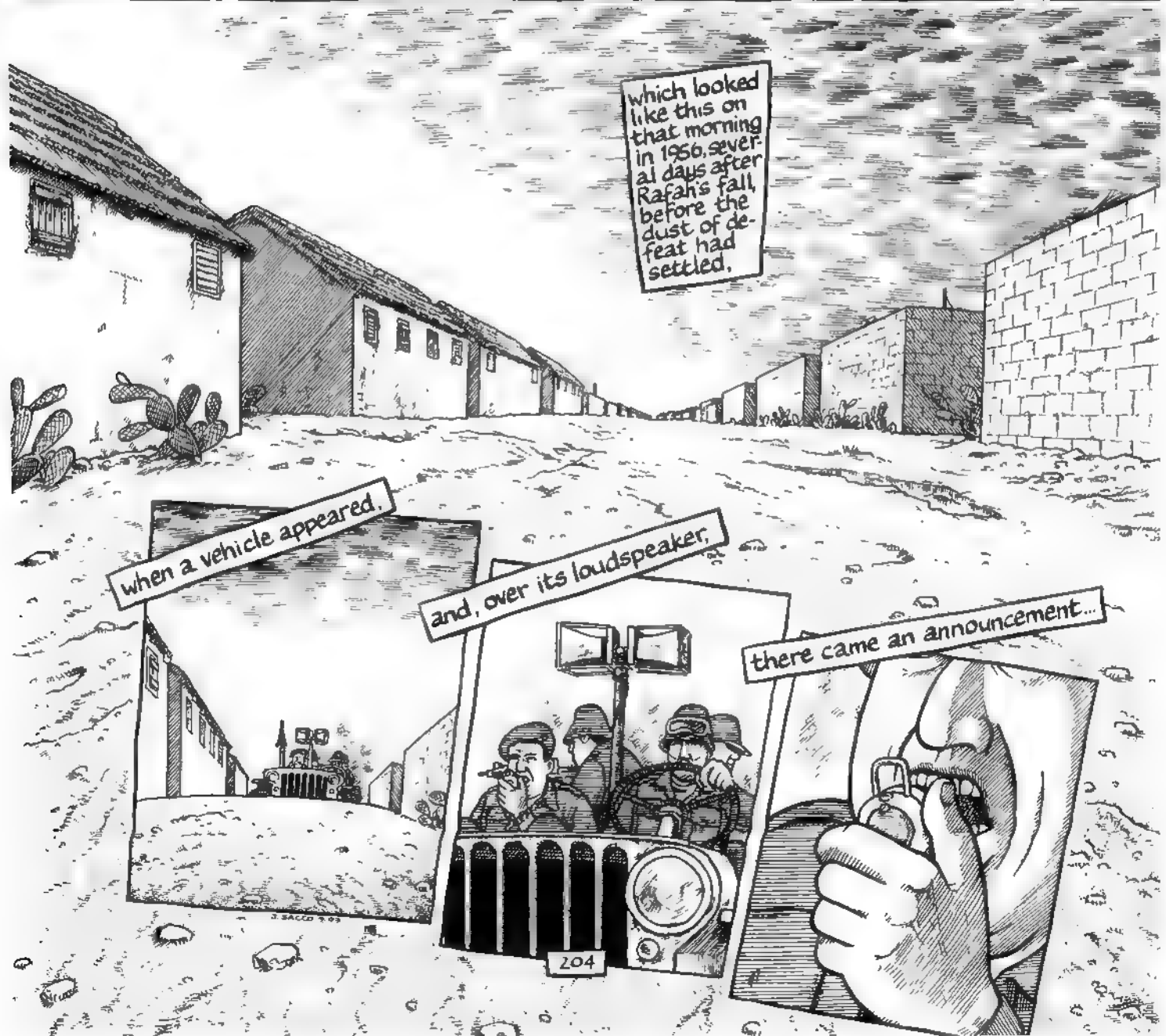


Abed and I are running a very organized investigation over here, and we've broken down the main event into its component parts.



The chart allows us to make quick comparisons between the testimony of each witness.





"It was an unforgettable day."

"November 12, 1956"

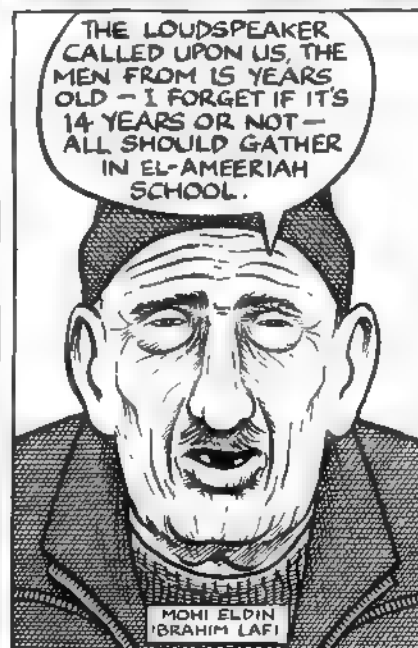
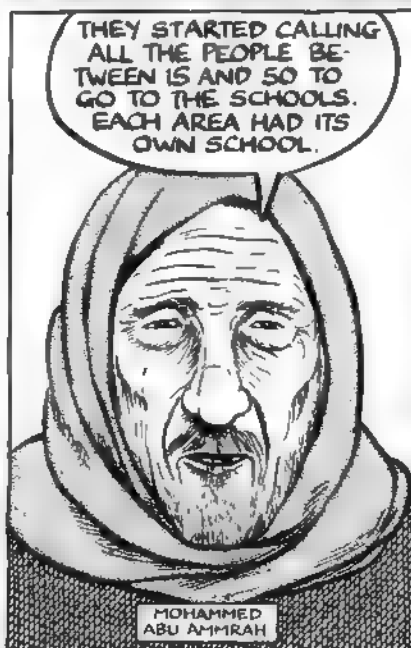
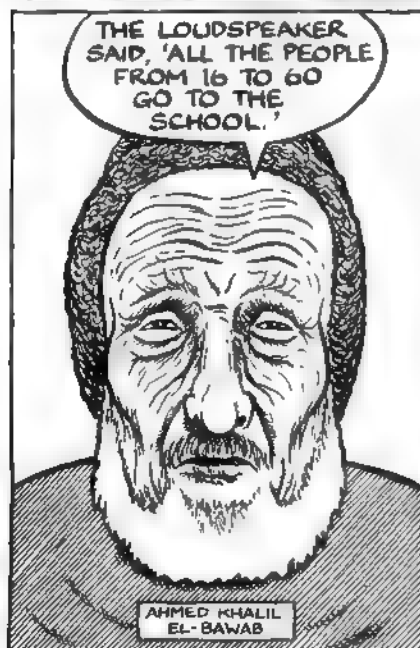
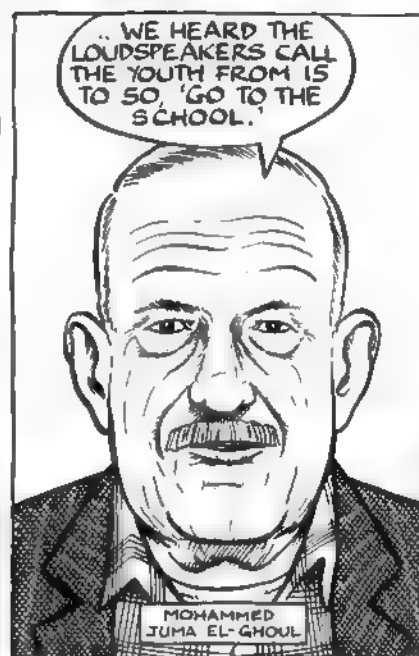
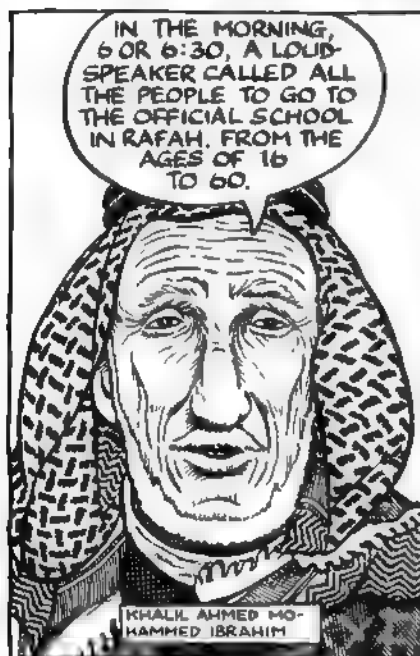
"It is written in my brain."

"It was a Monday..."

"The Jews called through the loudspeaker for men between 15 and 60 to go to the school."

AWADALLAH
AHMED
AWADALLAH

ANNOUNCEMENT



Despite minor differences in recollection, it's clear that men of military age were being ordered to assemble.

But the jeep or jeeps making the announcement seem to have kept to the few main streets — Sea Street in particular.

I HEARD THE LOUDSPEAKER, BUT I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND EXACTLY WHAT WAS SAID



MUSA ABDULLAH EL HAJJ MOHAMMED

WE DIDN'T HEAR THE LOUDSPEAKER A LOT OF PEOPLE WENT LATE



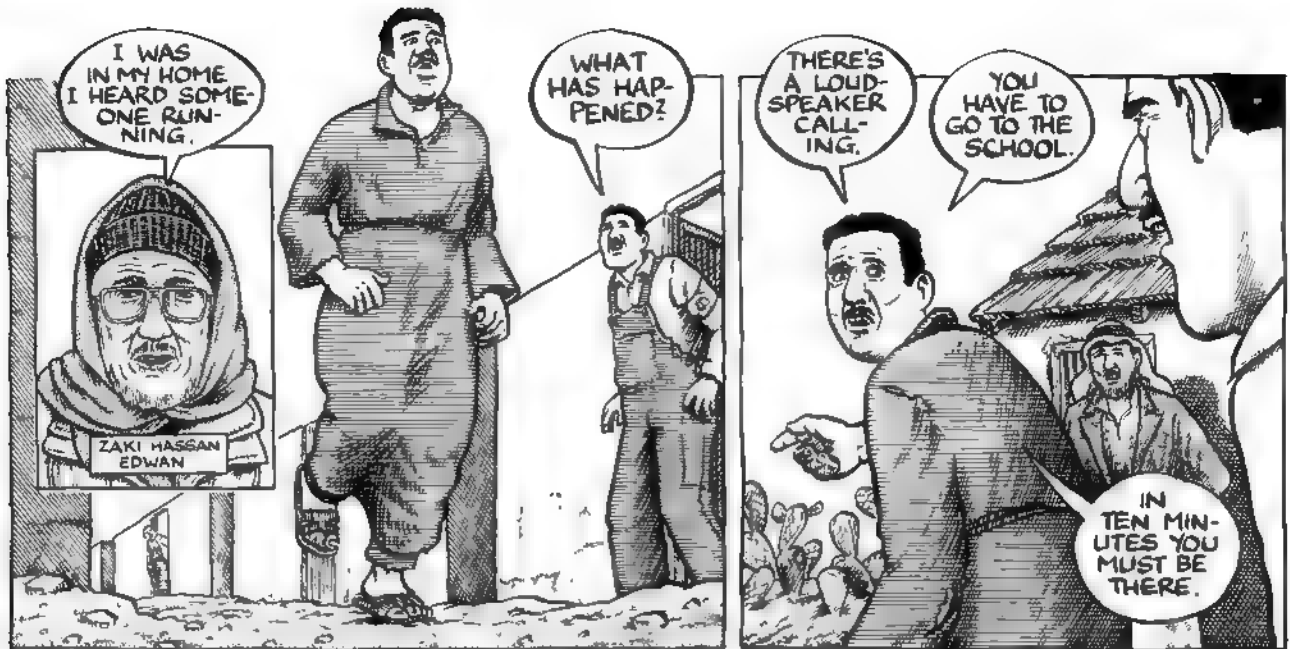
YOUSEF ISMAEL FOUDA

"The people started to tell each other—"

THERE IS AN ANNOUNCEMENT!

THERE IS AN ANNOUNCEMENT!





GHANIM MAHMOUD SHA'AT. "[My cousin] Elabed told me to wait until my brothers came.

"We saw my brothers coming with wood on their backs. People were already walking in the streets.



"We didn't panic. We didn't know what was going to happen."

Ayesh Abdel-Khalik Younis has been hard to pin down.

First he was away on a hajj, and then he needed several days to receive guests and distribute small gifts as is customary after the pilgrimage to Mecca.

After that he required a few days rest.

Now, finally, we are sitting in his cold front room and he is telling us about that November morning.

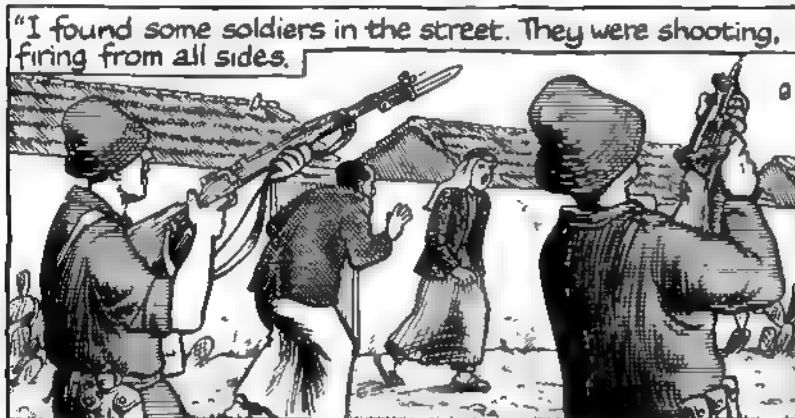
THE SUN SHINED THAT DAY WITH YELLOW RAYS WHICH DECLARED THE RAYS OF DEATH WERE COMING.

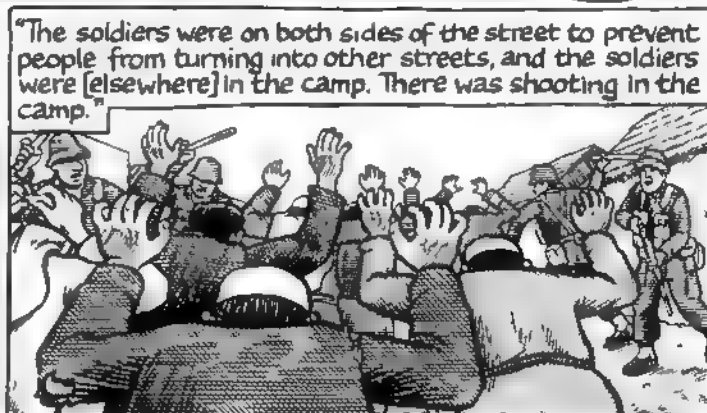
But we're not interested in rhetorical flourishes honed by his years as a mukhtar counseling his clan and resolving disputes.

We want to see those hours through the eyes of the 21-year-old UNRWA teacher he once was.

I WAS WOKEN BY THE VOICE OF MY COUSIN TELLING ME, 'WAKE UP OR THEY'LL KILL YOU!'

SEA STREET

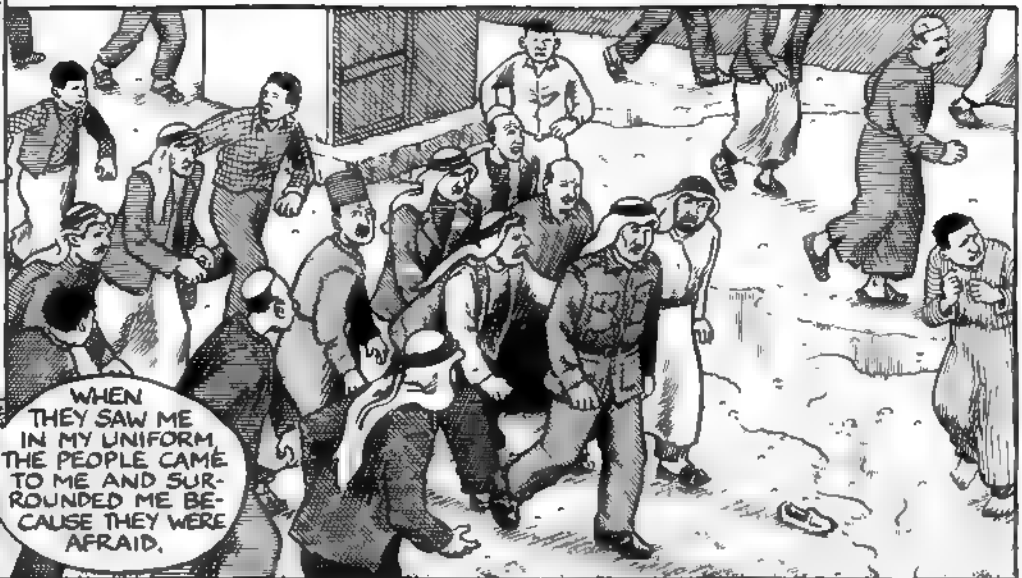




Khalil Ahmed Mohammed Ibrahim, a policeman at the time, left for the school dressed in his uniform.



WHEN THEY SAW ME IN MY UNIFORM THE PEOPLE CAME TO ME AND SURROUNDED ME BECAUSE THEY WERE AFRAID.



"We met the army. They were firing arbitrarily."



"One of the Israelis spoke to me in Arabic."



"I thought when I turned my back he'd shoot me. My left side froze."

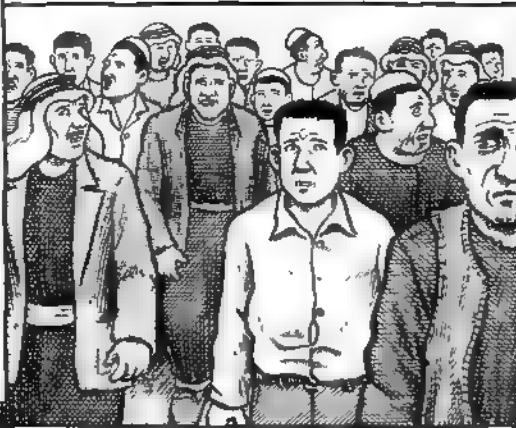


"The people who had been with me at first kept on walking."



"And now a different group of people walked with me."

MOHAMMED ZIDAN.
 "I was with my two uncles and their boys. With some of our neighbors, about 30 people. We went to the main road. There was heavy firing throughout the town. We felt moving in a group would be safer for us."



"We saw the vehicle with the microphone coming from the eastern side...toward us."



"[A soldier] told us to raise our hands and start running to the school."



"We found a body on the side of the road."



"His name was Abed Atiyah Shaat"

"He was about 35 years old."

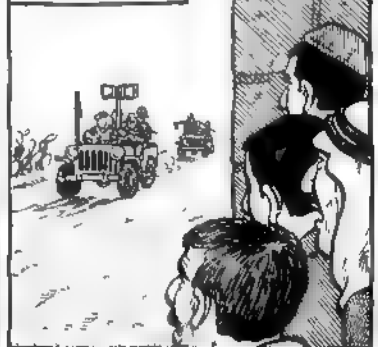
"And three women came and pulled the body inside a house."



"We stood for awhile thinking to [go] back... And we re-entered the narrow streets of the camp."



"The military vehicle... came back."



"A group of us, went to the jeep and told them that they were shooting people in the street."

"WE SAW A BODY IN THE STREET."

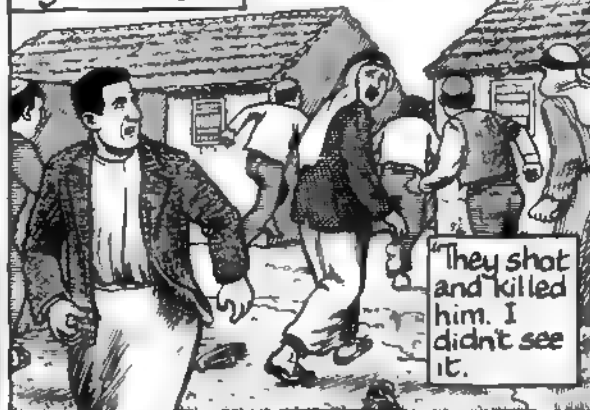
"SHOOTING, SHOOTING, NEVER MIND"

"YOU HAVE TO GO TO THE SCHOOL."

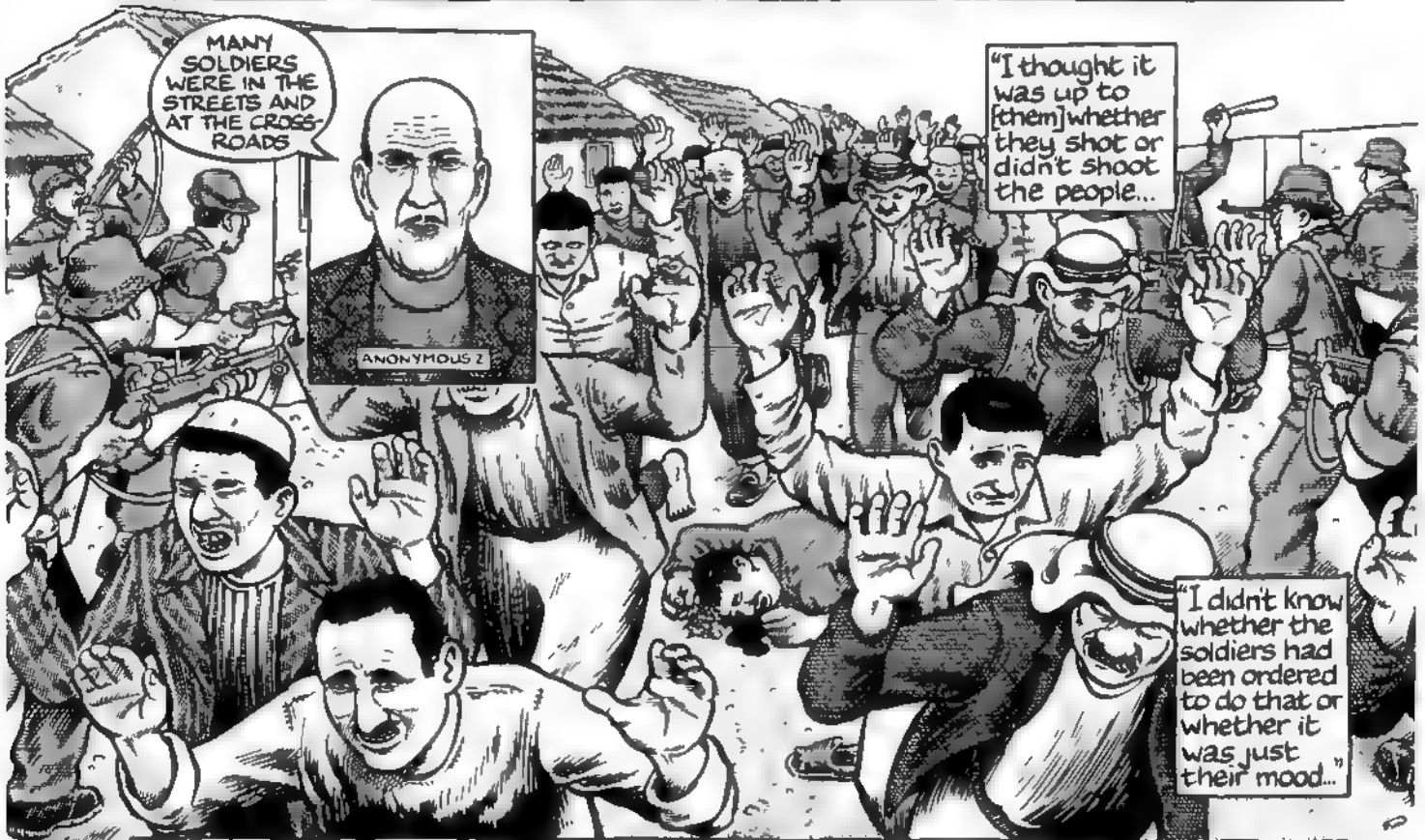
"WE ARE GOING TO LOOK FOR MEN INSIDE THE HOUSES, AND IF WE FIND ANYONE, WE WILL KILL HIM."



"I heard the shooting and came back...but my uncle went.



"The children and women...convinced me to go to the school...



AND THE SOLDIERS WERE SAYING.



"Abdelghani El-Asmar was shot in front of me...When his son went to him, they shot him, too."

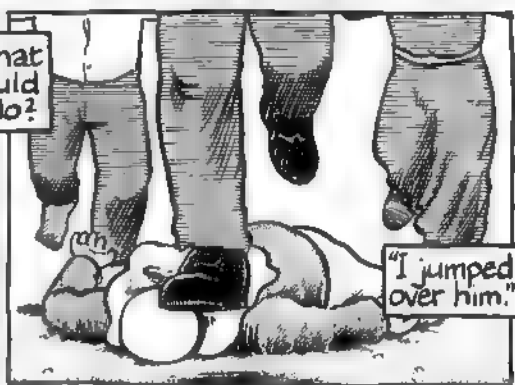


ZAKI HASSAN
EDWAN

ONE
MAN WAS
RUNNING IN
FRONT OF ME,
AND HE WAS
SHOT AND WENT
DOWN.



"What
could
I do?"



"I jumped
over him."

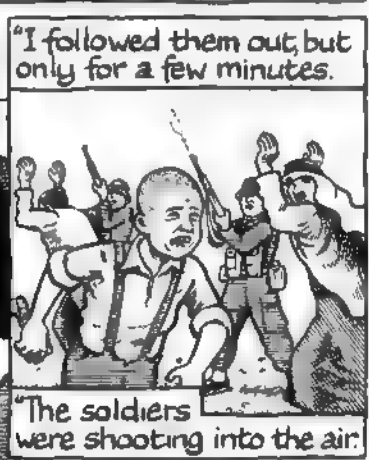


ANONYMOUS 3

MY
FATHER
AND THREE
BROTHERS
LEFT THE
HOUSE.



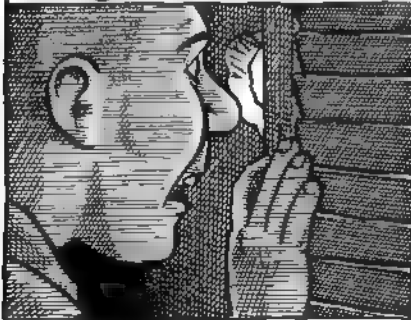
"We were
shouting
and crying"



"I followed them out, but
only for a few minutes."

"The soldiers
were shooting into the air."

"The main road ran directly
in front of my house. I
watched from a hole in the
wall by the window."



"The people came down the road one by one with their hands
on their heads in a line against the wall. The soldiers on
one side, the people on the other."





"Anyone who was injured or shot, the people left him and kept running. I might have seen three or four bodies on this road. And in each group one or two men were killed."



"When I reached the [UNRWA food] distribution center, I saw a funny sight."



"The shoes of the people filled the street."

We are back with Ayesh Abdel Khalik Younis. His memory is strong and, with the aid of a map, we want his recollection of how Israeli soldiers directed the human traffic coming eastward along Sea Street toward the school.

THE FIRING WAS FROM ALL SIDES. I RAN UNTIL I REACHED THIS POINT-

NEXT TO OUR FLAT IN THE MIDDLE BEFORE THE CAR PARK



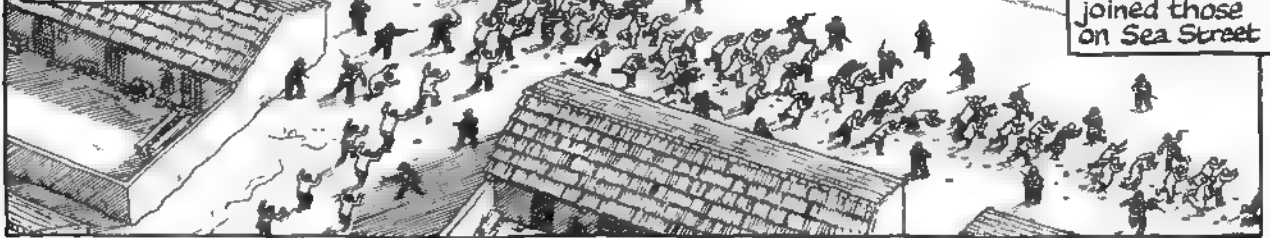
MAPS NOT TO SCALE

"And there I saw some soldiers with heavy machine guns, Bren guns, lying on the ground and from time to time they shot at the people."

DID THEY SEEM TO BE SHOOTING RANDOMLY INTO THE CROWD?

"To be honest, from my point of view, they were shooting just to terrify the people, but afterwards people told me that the killing had sometimes been on purpose."

"[The men] were lined up like the lines of a net...and they were crowded together."



"Some of the people came from the south side of the street, near this area, the field, and joined those on Sea Street"

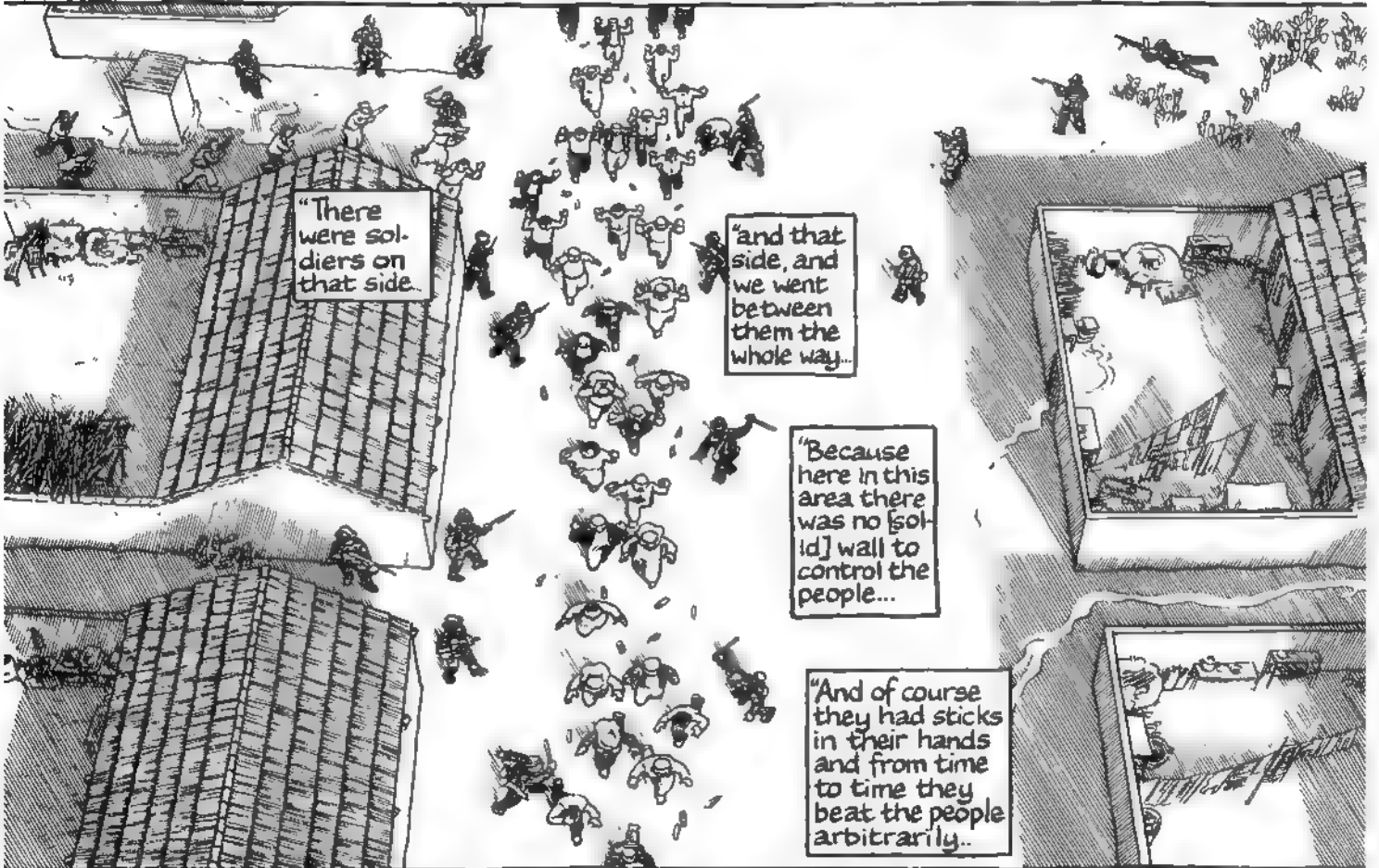


"There were soldiers on that side."

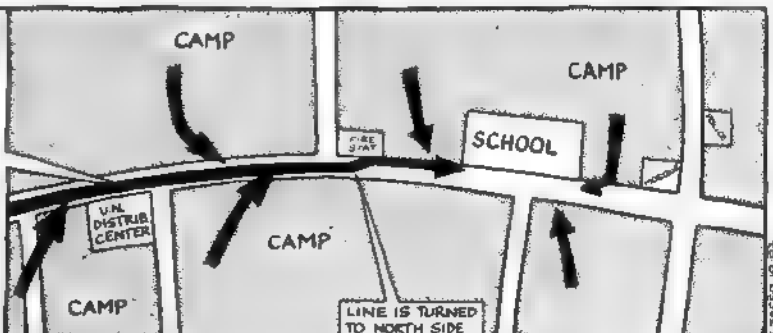
"and that side, and we went between them the whole way..."

"Because here in this area there was no [solid] wall to control the people..."

"And of course they had sticks in their hands and from time to time they beat the people arbitrarily..."



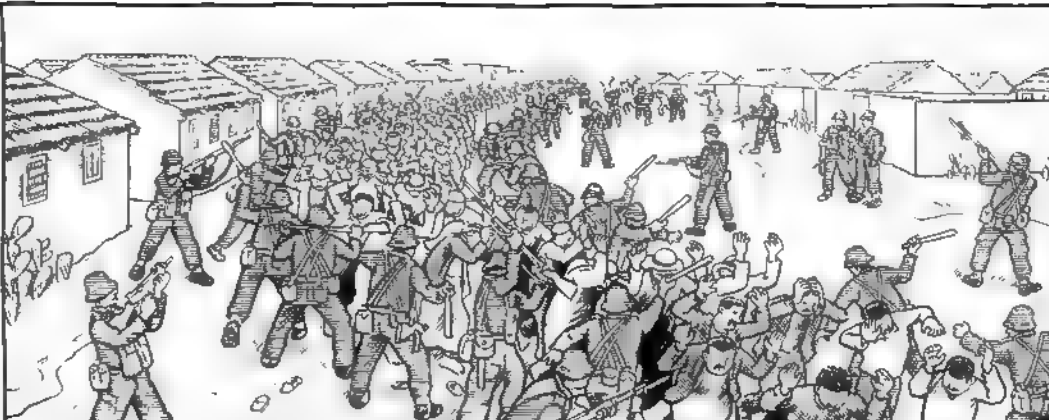
"In this way we moved up to the distribution center. At that point I saw a body on the ground. His name was Jamil, from Ager [village]."



LOCATION OF BUILDINGS APPROXIMATE

LINE IS TURNED TO NORTH SIDE OF SEA STREET (SEE NEXT PAGE)

"We moved this way, on the south side of the street, until we reached the [present] fire station... There exactly... we [were] moved from the south side to the north... by pushing and heavy sticks and shooting."



When we last saw Ghanim Mahmoud Sha'at, he was leaving the house with his two brothers and his cousin Elabed

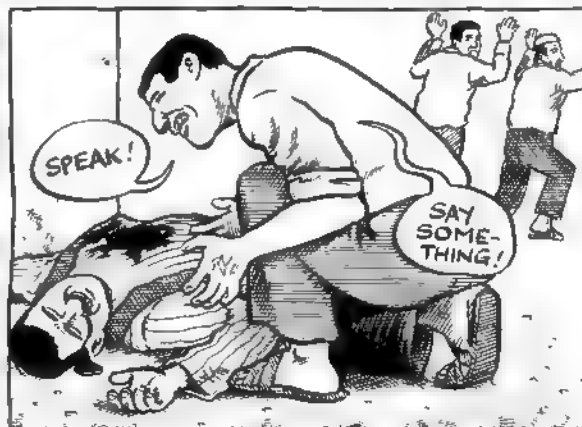
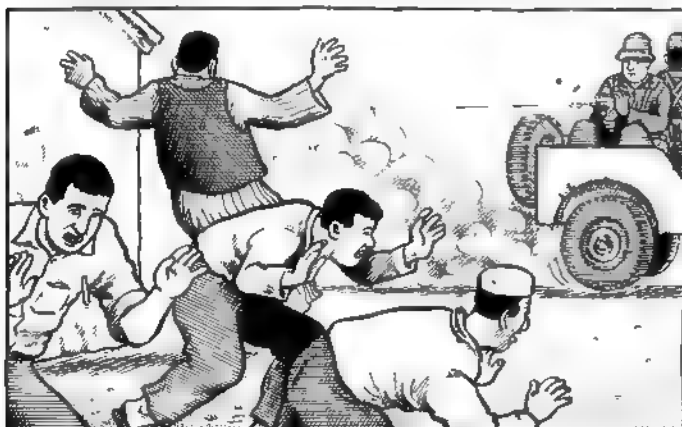


GHANIM MAHMOUD SHA'AT
"We went through the narrow roads Elabed was in front, I was in the back"

"When we reached the corner of the school, I took out a cigarette."



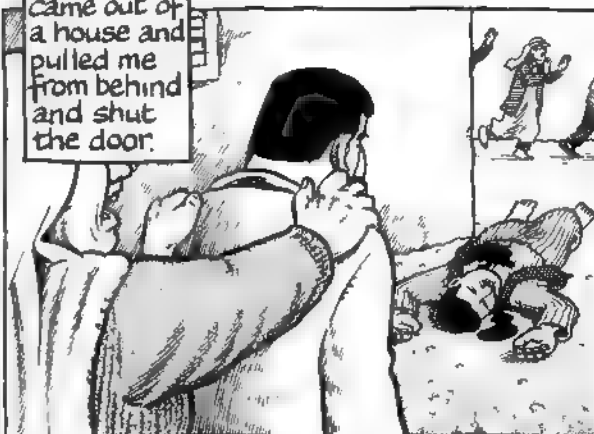
"Suddenly we saw two jeeps coming..."



"While I was sitting with him, the jeeps were coming back



"A woman came out of a house and pulled me from behind and shut the door.



"When the jeeps had gone, she brought a blanket and, with another woman, we carried the body.. and returned to the camp



"We brought the martyr back to his house. Elabed's father asked,



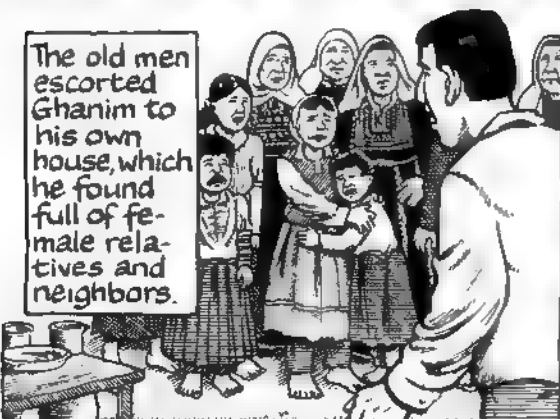
"He started screaming and shouting.



"The old men told me to go to the school."



The old men escorted Ghanim to his own house, which he found full of female relatives and neighbors.



"I washed my hands and my face and lay down.



Mohammed Atwa El-Najeeli is a jocular man, well known in Rafah for his incredible story.

I FOUND A GROUP OF SEVEN OR EIGHT PEOPLE FROM THE MASAMHA FAMILY.

I JOINED THEM.

"We walked up to Sea Street, with our hands raised, toward the school..."

"I saw one of my neighbors Swaireh the barber.

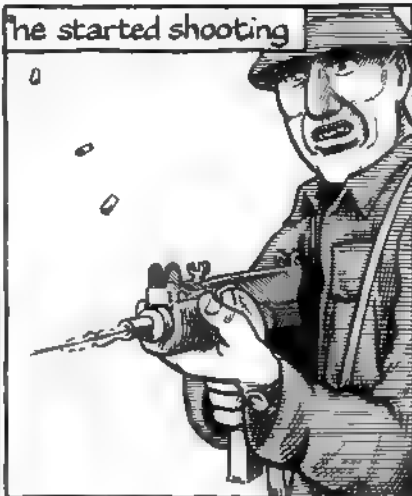
"He'd just been shot by the Israelis.

"And we were walking in front of the distribution center... There were soldiers standing in the streets."

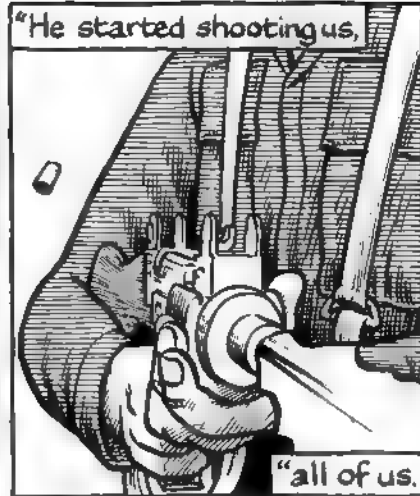
"When [one of them] noticed
that there were young men in
our group,



he started shooting



"He started shooting us,



"Now we are
on the ground
and people
are coming
from behind,
walking on
our bodies.



"Now I feel
that I am
going to
die.

"I tried to pinch a person also lying on the ground, but got no response."



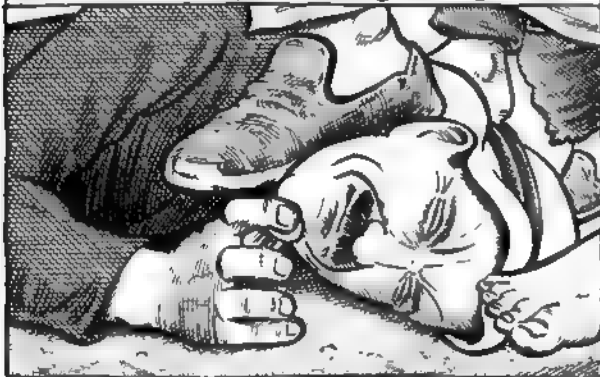
"The one behind me, the same Nothing."



"All of them dead. I am alive. Only one bullet."



"But all the people walking on my neck!"



I WAS WEARING GOOD CLOTHES AND LOOKED GOOD.

AT THAT TIME I DIDN'T DESERVE TO BE SHOT.

BUT NOW I DESERVE IT.



"I took off my... hatta and told the soldier:"

COME HERE AND SHOOT ME.



"He didn't come."

"For the second time I asked him



COME HERE

COME HERE

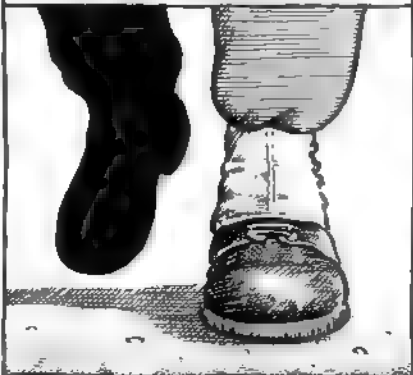
COME AND SHOOT ME

I AM STILL ALIVE

"He prepared his gun, put in a full clip,



"and came towards me..



"He stood over my body."



THERE IS NO GOD BUT GOD.



"I could feel them...searching through my clothes to find my identification—"

—AND IF THERE WAS SOMETHING ELSE, MAYBE TO TAKE IT.

"The blood poured from every part of my body."

"I sank in the blood."

FROM 1956 UP TO NOW, I'M SUFFERING.

THE OLDER I GET, THE MORE PAINFUL IT GETS.

Back at our place, I can't get my head around the improbability of surviving 36 bullets shot at pointblank range.

Still... HANI GOT SHOT SEVEN TIMES BY A GUN RIGHT UP AGAINST HIS BODY. I'VE SEEN THE SCARS.

THERE'S A GUY IN KHAN YOUNIS WHO WAS SHOT 42 TIMES IN HIS STOMACH. HE CARRIED HIS INTESTINES TO THE HOSPITAL.

IT'S A WELL-KNOWN STORY

But I'm very skeptical that Mohammed could have survived so many bullets to the head. And how would he know how many had been fired? Automatic fire is too rapid to count, especially, I bet, while being shot.

Exaggeration or not, I don't doubt he was hit by bullets



Just before we left him, he insisted I finger one or two of the indentations made in his skull.

J. SAGGO 11-03

While Mohammed Atwa El-Najeeli lay badly injured, the main current of Rafah's men reached the school where they were funneled into another segment of the gantlet.

THE SCHOOL WALL



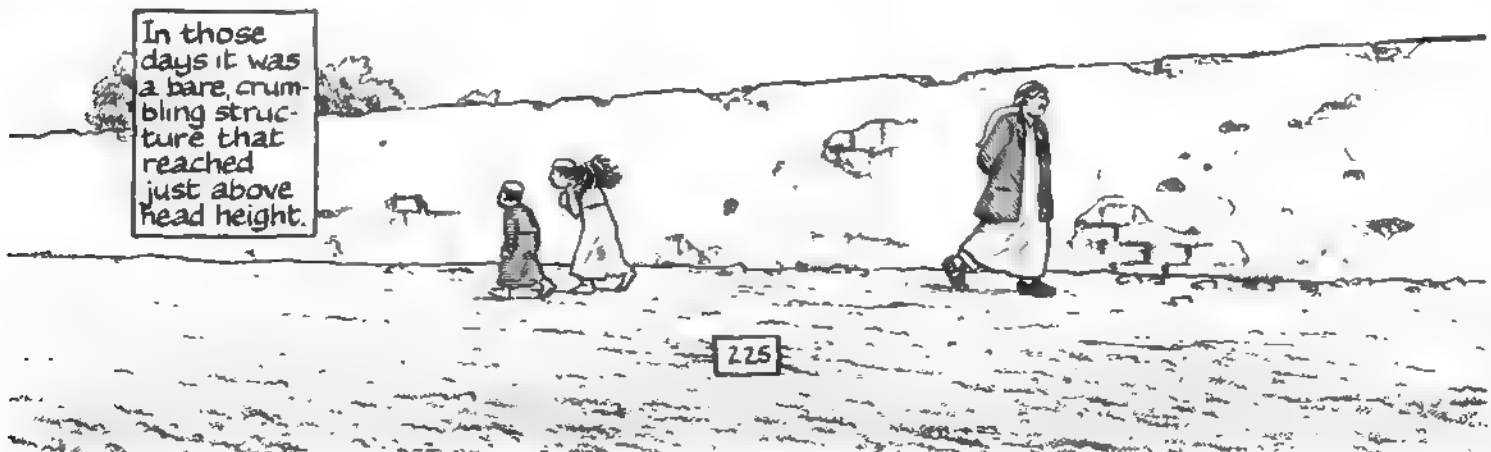
I WAS SURPRISED TO SEE PEOPLE HOLDING THEIR HANDS UP AND LINED AGAINST THE WALL OF THE SCHOOL.

KHALIL AHMED MOHAMMED IBRAHIM

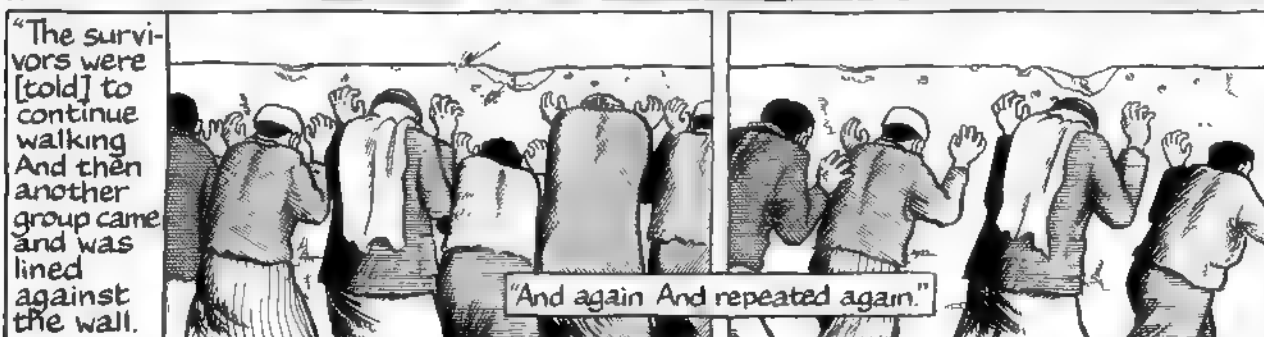
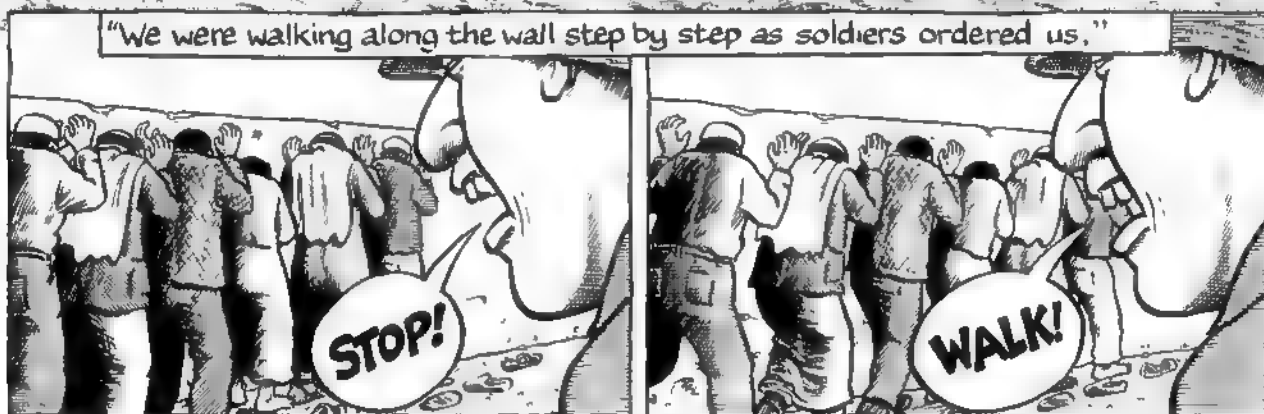


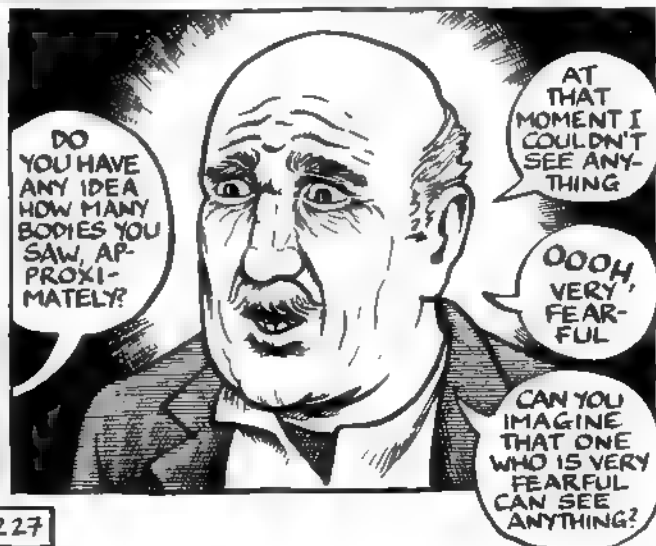
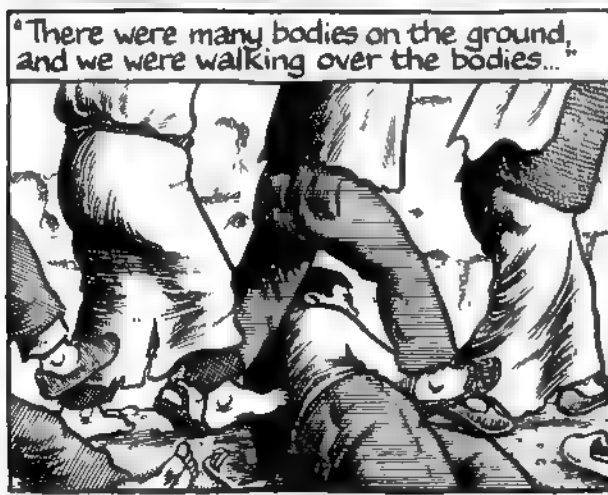
Today the wall is jammed with small shops selling everything from cassette tapes to handbags.

J. SACCO 1/03



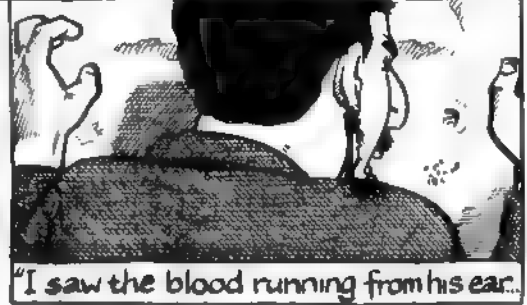
In those days it was a bare, crumbling structure that reached just above head height.







"A colleague of mine, his name was Ahmed El-Abed, the bottom of his ear was shot while he was standing at the wall."



"I saw the blood running from his ear..."

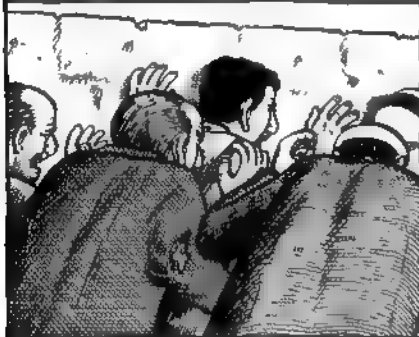


"They were stopping us... shooting arbitrarily at the people, and then telling us to enter the school - and then they received another group."





"Where could we go? Fly away? Jump over the wall?"



"We didn't know where to go..."



"I wish the wall had collapsed so I could have gone in."

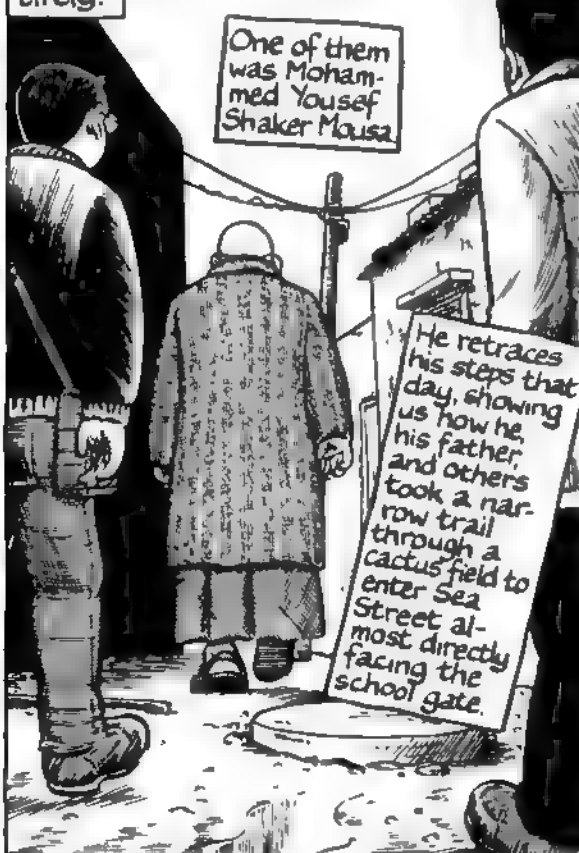




THE SCHOOL GATE



Some who lived in the area across from the entrance avoided the shootings on Sea Street and the line-up against the wall entirely.





"The street was full of people running toward the school. So they were beating people randomly."

"Some were jumping into the school, entering over the eastern wall, because it was a low wall at the time."



"Because the people outnumbered them. A lot of people came to the school from all sides."



He motions to Fatima El-Khateeb Street, which runs into Sea Street.

WHERE THAT RED CAR IS.



"I saw 10 or 11 bodies on the ground."

"All of them were killed. I didn't see the killing, but I saw the bodies."

"They were thrown on the ground without any order."



He tells us the gate was corrugated zinc back then, not the sturdy iron door we see today.



He says when the men of Rafah reached the school gate, they found a ditch and barbed wire obstructing their path



And here we come to a part of the story that remains burned into even the most age-dulled minds.

Though some of the men don't remember the barbed wire and others don't remember the ditch, almost to a man they remember something else at the school entrance —

the soldiers with the heavy sticks.



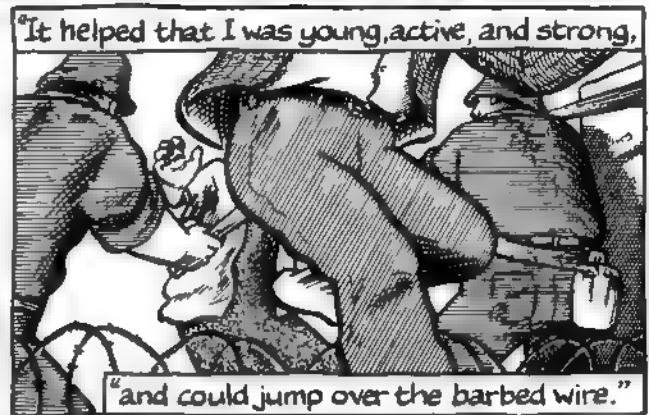
"The blood was flowing from my head. Blood was flowing from other people also."



"I jumped over the barbed wire..."



"and went to the people and sat with them."

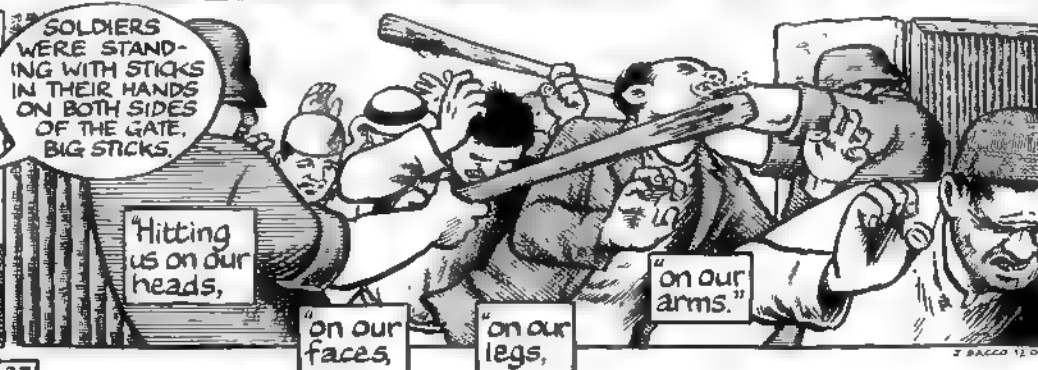
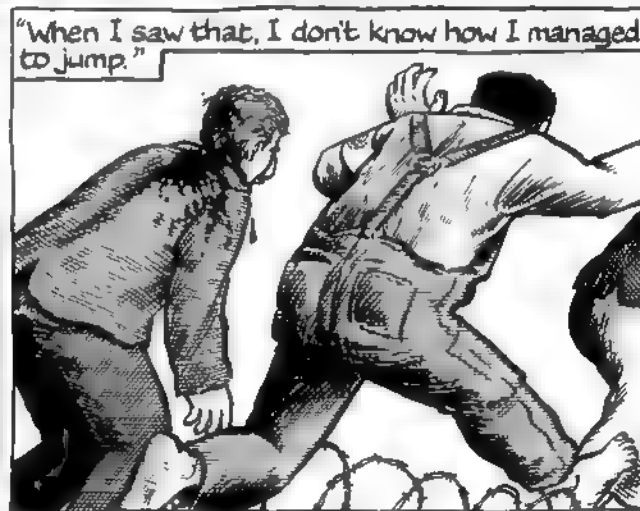
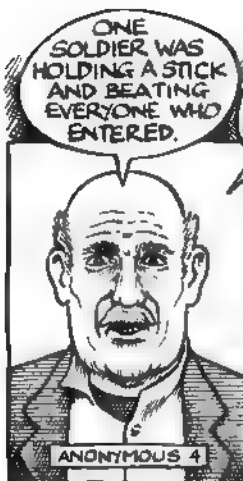




"I kept my body close to the wall. So I was free to move, not like the other people."

"When I got to the gate, I just broke away and went through."







AHMED KHALIL EL-BAWAS

TWO SOLDIERS CARRYING STICKS WERE AT THE ENTRANCE, AND THEY HIT EVERYONE WHO WENT IN.



MOHAMMED JUMA EL-GHOUL

I SAW TWO ISRAELIS ... THEY HAD BIG STICKS, AND EVERYONE WHO WENT IN, THEY HIT.

SOME PEOPLE FELL DOWN. SOME PEOPLE THEY MISSED.

WHEN WE REACHED THE SCHOOL THEY HAD A TRENCH AT THE GATE... THEY WERE BEATING PEOPLE WITH HEAVY STICKS AND MAKING THEM JUMP OVER IT.



MOHAMMED HASHIM IBRAHIM ABU TALIB

I WASN'T HIT.



EL-SAYED ABDEL HAMID ABU TAHA

TWO SOLDIERS HERE,

AND TWO SOLDIERS THERE,

AND EVERYONE WHO ENTERED WAS BEATEN ON THE HEAD WITH A STICK

THIS I REMEMBER WELL: THREE OR FOUR ISRAELI SOLDIERS WITH HEAVY STICKS OF ABOUT 1½ TO TWO METERS IN THEIR HANDS.



MOHAMMED HASSAN MOHAMMED

I WASN'T HIT. I WAS LIGHT AND SPORTY - OR YOU COULD SAY IT WAS LUCK



IBRAHIM BAKER

I MANAGED TO ENTER WITHOUT BEING BEATEN.



ABDEL HADI MOHAMMED LAFI

I WAS BEATEN BY ONE OF THE SOLDIERS STANDING AT THE SCHOOL GATE WITH HIS STICK - [ON] MY SHOULDERS AND ALL OVER MY BODY.

The policeman Khalil Ahmed Mohammed Ibrahim was nearing the school entrance when he was joined by a colleague.

HE WAS A POLICEMAN (TOO), BUT HE WASN'T WEARING HIS UNIFORM.

THE DISTANCE BETWEEN ME AND THE SCHOOL GATE - ABOUT FOUR OR FIVE METERS.

WHEN I GOT TO THE GATE I LOOKED TO THE RIGHT...AND SAW TWO BODIES TWO MEN WHO HAD BEEN KILLED

"Up Fatima El-Khateeb Street, about 15 meters away. I thought they might be friends because...I had friends in that area."

WHEN I SAW THOSE BODIES, I DIDN'T KNOW HOW I KEPT ON WALKING

I FORGOT MYSELF.

NOW I AM WALKING WITH MY POLICEMAN FRIEND

I HAVE TO GO INTO THE SCHOOL.

"There is a soldier, a short soldier, about a meter and a half tall, who has a heavy stick."



"And now I'm going toward him."



I'M JUST WALKING

I HAD LOST MY MIND

THE STICK THE SOLDIER WAS HOLDING WAS IRON

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

DO YOU WANT TO BE KILLED?

COME HERE!

AND HE PULLED ME AND TOOK ME AWAY.

AND THEN I WOKE UP.



"And we kept walking, and my friend seemed to be guiding me because I still didn't know where we could go."



"We just kept walking,

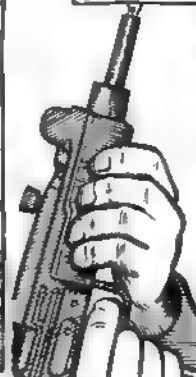
"kept walking."



"When we reached the [police] station they took us to... a room nearby. They put us inside and locked the door and put a guard on us.



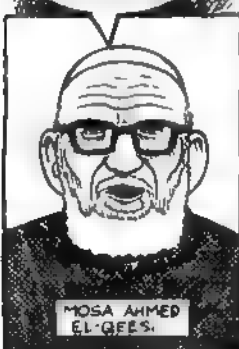
"And every few minutes... he fired just to panic us



"Just to let us know he was there"

Their intimidation notwithstanding, the Israeli army considered local policemen as assets. Their cooperation would soon be enlisted to help consolidate the occupation of Gaza.

AT THE [SCHOOL] GATE THERE WAS A HUGE [NUMBER] OF SHOES



MOSA AHMED EL-GEES

"Whoever arrived thought everyone was supposed to take off his shoes



"While they were taking off their shoes, they were getting beaten."



I TOOK OFF MY SHOES.



ABDULLAH [MOHAMMED AHMED EL-ARGAN] WAS IN FRONT OF ME, AND WE WERE WALKING CLOSE TO EACH OTHER.



SALEM MEHI ELDIN EL-ARGAN



"A Jewish soldier came and beat him on his head with the stick.



"He fell down on his face





"They pulled his body to the other side of the street..."

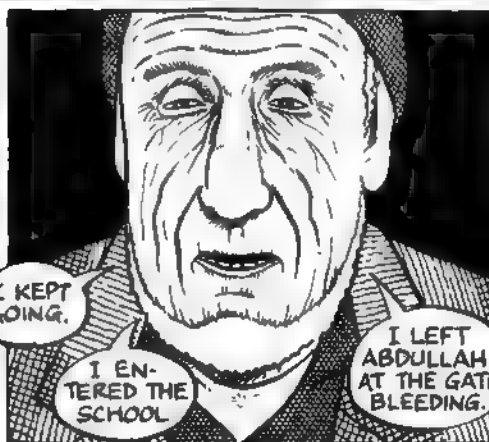
"There were people carrying the bodies from the street and putting them in cars like bags of flour."



"WE'RE WALKING WITH YOU, OKAY?"

"ABDULLAH IS IN FRONT OF YOU."

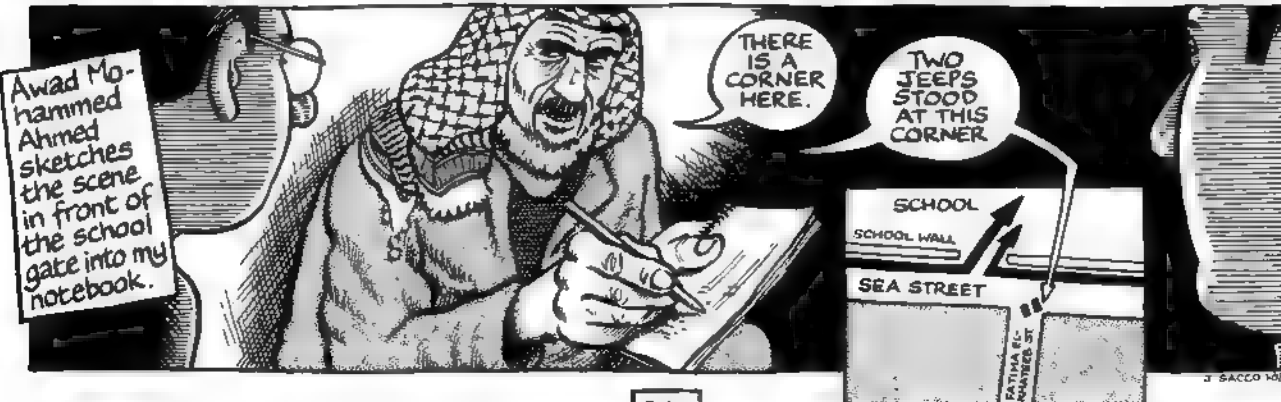
"ABDULLAH WAS HIT AND YOU KEPT GOING?"



"I KEPT GOING."

"I ENTERED THE SCHOOL"

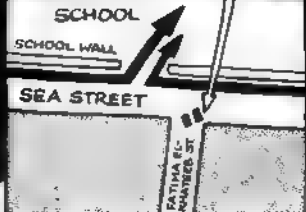
"I LEFT ABDULLAH AT THE GATE BLEEDING."



Awad Mohammed Ahmed sketches the scene in front of the school gate into my notebook.

"THERE IS A CORNER HERE."

"TWO JEEPS STOOD AT THIS CORNER"





"If someone fell, the soldiers took him to the jeeps. Whether he was alive or dead."

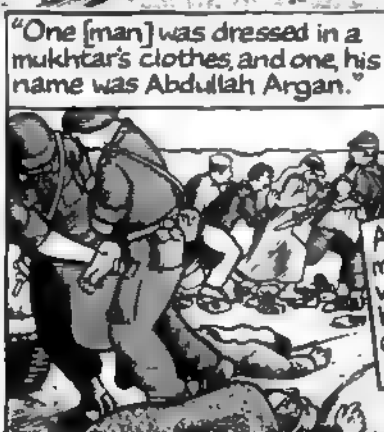
"They put four people in each jeep."

"And they took them to the western side."



"DID YOU SEE THE JEEPS YOURSELF? DID YOU SEE THEM CARRYING THE BODIES?"

"I SAW THEM TAKING A GROUP OF BODIES. I SAW THEM ONCE."



"One [man] was dressed in a mukhtar's clothes and one, his name was Abdullah Argan."



"Awad motions with a hand down his skull."

"A head split open."



AHMED HASSAN EDWAN



"ANYONE WHO WAS BEATEN AND FELL DOWN, HE WAS DEAD."

"Even if he was still alive, they shot and killed him."



"DID YOU SEE ANY OF THAT WITH YOUR EYES?"

"YES I SAW MANY BODIES ON THE GROUND BEFORE JUMPING OVER THE TRENCH..."



"and because I was tall and strong, I jumped quickly..."



IT WILL NEVER LEAVE MY MIND.

MOHI EL DIN IBRAHIM LAFI

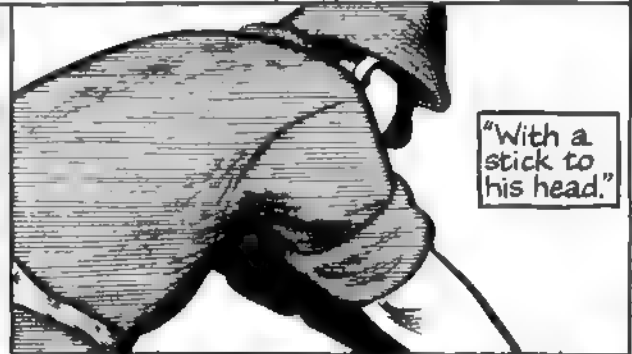
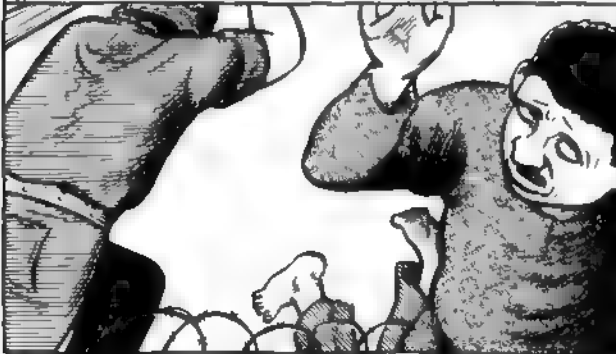
"A young man was entering the school in front of me,

"and they beat him on his head."



HE FELL DOWN AND MOVED ON THE GROUND AND MADE SOUNDS LIKE A SLAUGHTERED CHICKEN.

"I looked back to see what happened to him... And another one came and killed him.



"With a stick to his head."



WHAT WAS HIS NAME?

I DON'T KNOW HIS NAME.

AT THE TIME IT WAS DIFFICULT.



IT WAS LIKE JUDGMENT DAY.

J. SACCIO 1108

SHLOMO

Nineteen fifty-six or not, life goes on, the present needs tending, and Abed must beat the deadline for his university and grant applications — so we're back in Gaza City where I'm trying to help him finish up his essays.

But it hasn't been easy.

Not with that racket coming from out back!

A mourning tent!

Loudspeakers are blasting patriotic songs!

Messages of condolence!

Exhortations to Jihad!

Six Hamas militants were blown to bits yesterday under mysterious circumstances

Assassinated?

Killed in a "work accident"?

Depends which side you listen to.

With helicopters and a drone buzzing in our ears, we fall asleep

At 5am. heavy shooting erupts.

Eleven Palestinians are being killed.

Seven here in Gaza City.

Four in nearby Jabalia refugee camp.

The next day we're heading back to southern Gaza, and our driver is worked up about the "security talks" Palestinian representatives are having with Israelis in London.

THEY SIT AND TALK WITH US, AND THEN THEY COME AND KILL US!

WHY'D THEY COME INTO EL-SHEJAYA* ANYWAY?

WHAT'S THERE?



*EL-SHEJAYA. THE GAZA CITY NEIGHBORHOOD ATTACKED THAT MORNING

THEY DEMOLISHED THE HOME OF A GUY FROM ISLAMIC JIHAD.

HE BLEW HIMSELF UP AT THE Kfar DAROM SETTLEMENT ABOUT A YEAR AGO.



When we get to Abu Houli, we find the check-point closed.

THEY KILL 11 OF US, AND THEY'VE BLOCKED THE ROAD, TOO!

IT WILL TAKE US FOUR HOURS TO GET TO RAFAH!

IN FOUR HOURS WE COULD REACH AMERICA!

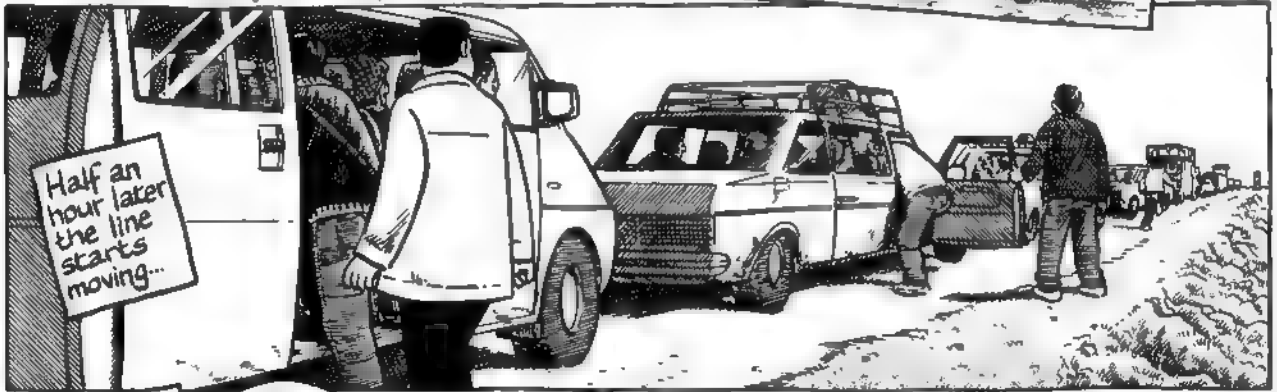
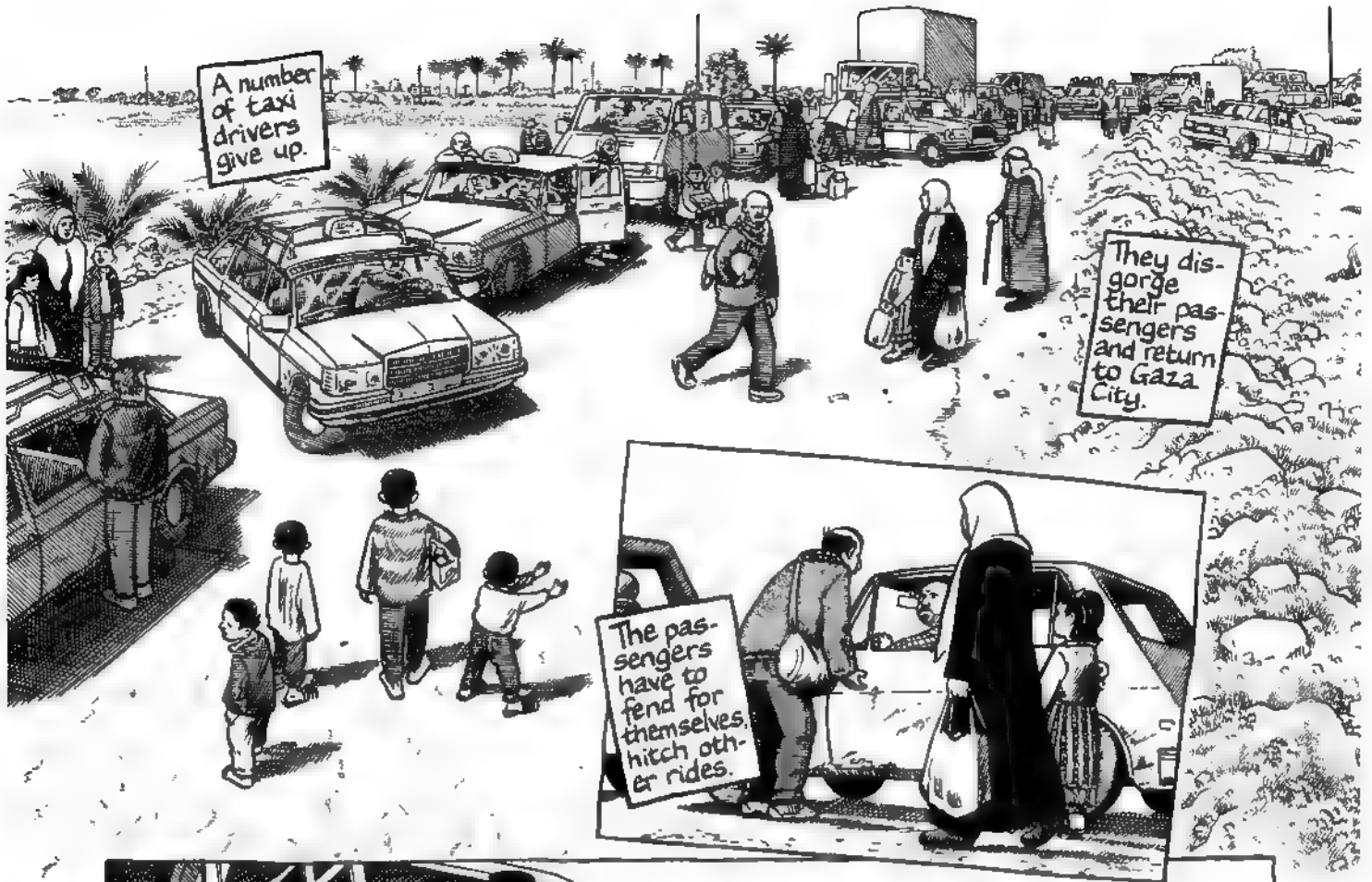


Oh well.

We're not going anywhere for a while.

Might as well stretch our legs.





WORSE THEN, WORSE NOW

FUCKING
STEP BY
STEP.

Since we
were last
at Ashraf's
house, the
bulldozers
have been
back

I ask him if his father still visits the dwelling.

YES,
DURING
THE DAY.

HE
KNEELS
BEFORE
THAT HOME

We enter a few nearby damaged houses, now vacant.

MY FATHER
BUILT THIS
HOME. I
HELPED
HIM.

In fact,
Ashraf's
dad's con-
struction
outfit
put up a
number of
houses in
this area
that are
now wrecked
or gone.

THERE
WAS A
HOUSE
HERE.

WHERE
IS IT?

Ashraf invites us to the apartment he's renting now in Block J. He says he can add a piece to our '56 story. He says his grandfather was killed in Rafah.

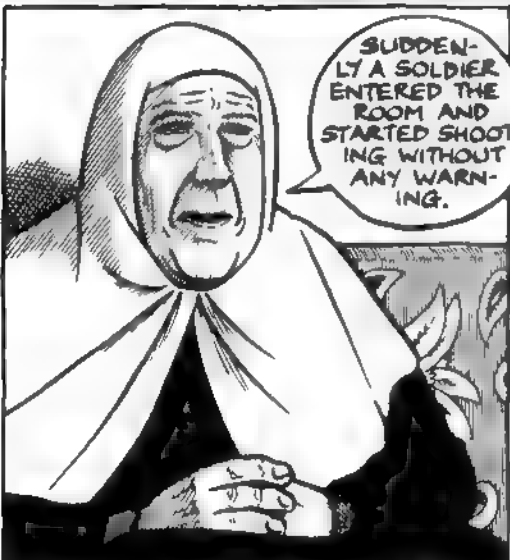
But Ashraf has it wrong.

Like many younger Palestinians who live today's events, his grasp of yesterday's is mixed up

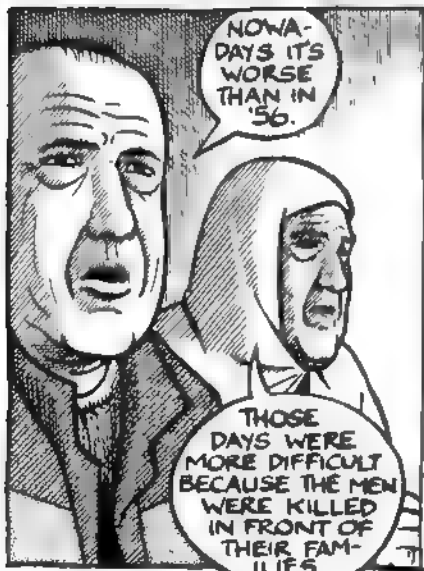
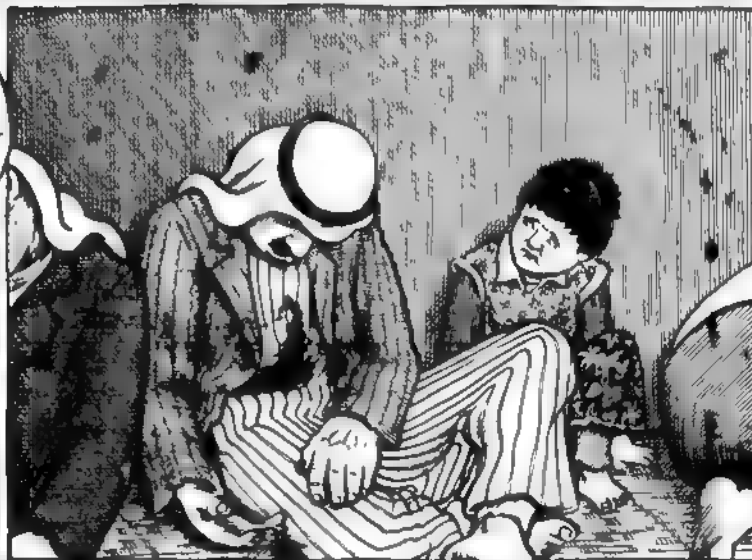
His grandfather was killed in Khan Younis, not Rafah

His mother, Wasfeya, tells us the story.

I WAS SITTING WITH MY FATHER LIKE YOU ARE SITTING WITH ASHRAF NOW.



SUDDENLY A SOLDIER ENTERED THE ROOM AND STARTED SHOOTING WITHOUT ANY WARNING.



NOWADAYS IT'S WORSE THAN IN '56.

THOSE DAYS WERE MORE DIFFICULT BECAUSE THE MEN WERE KILLED IN FRONT OF THEIR FAMILIES.

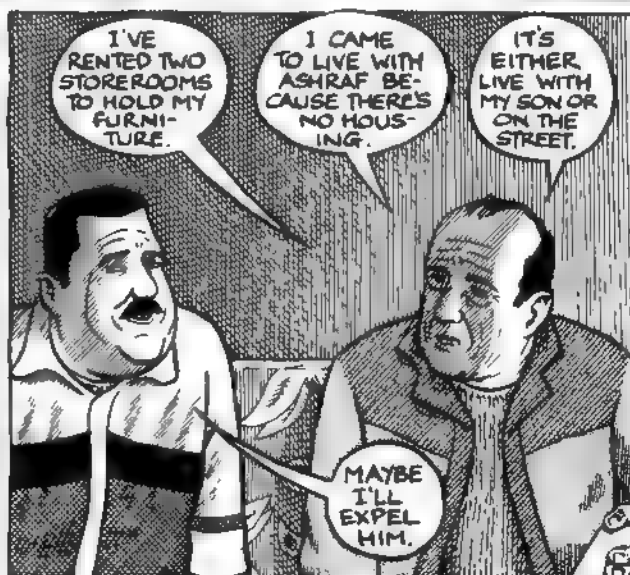
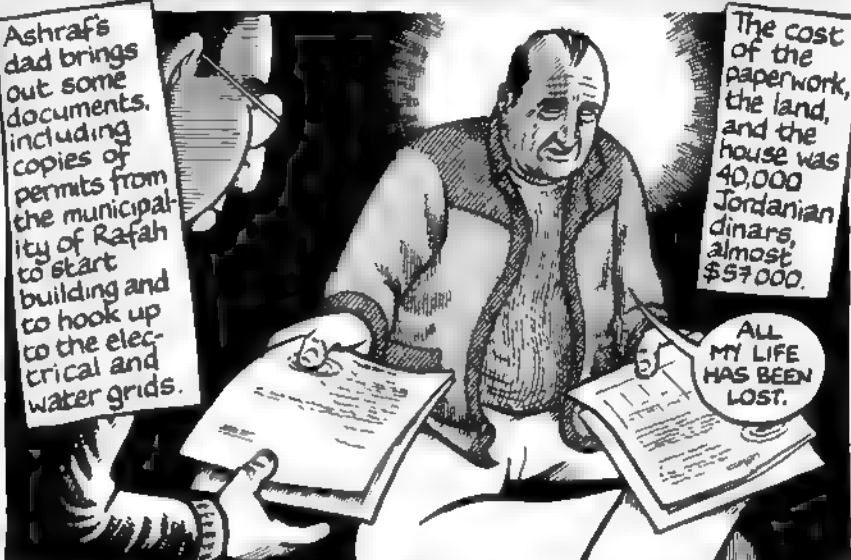
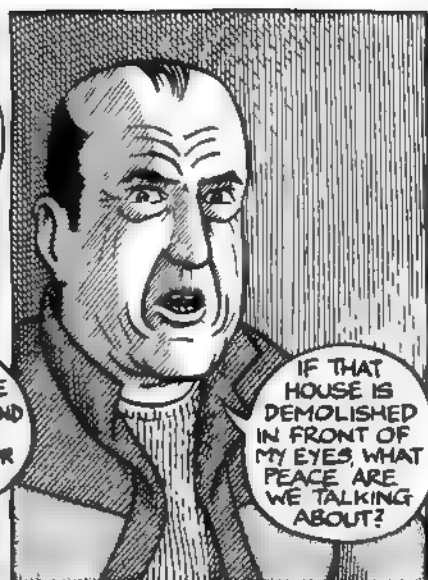
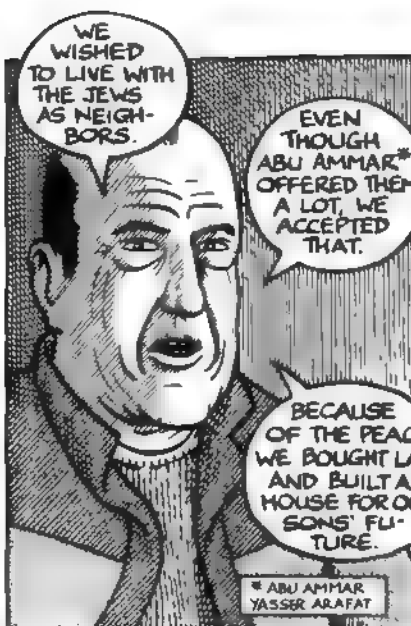
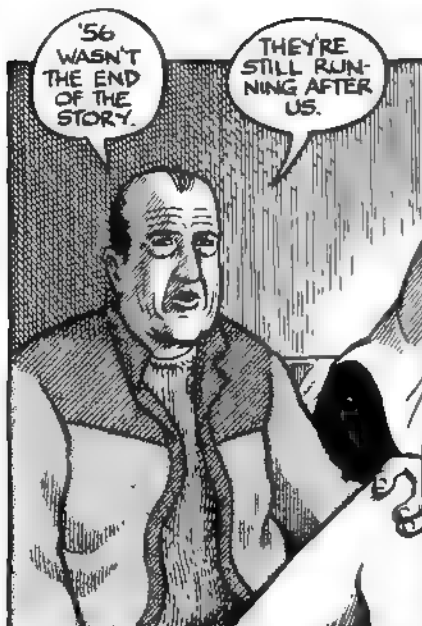


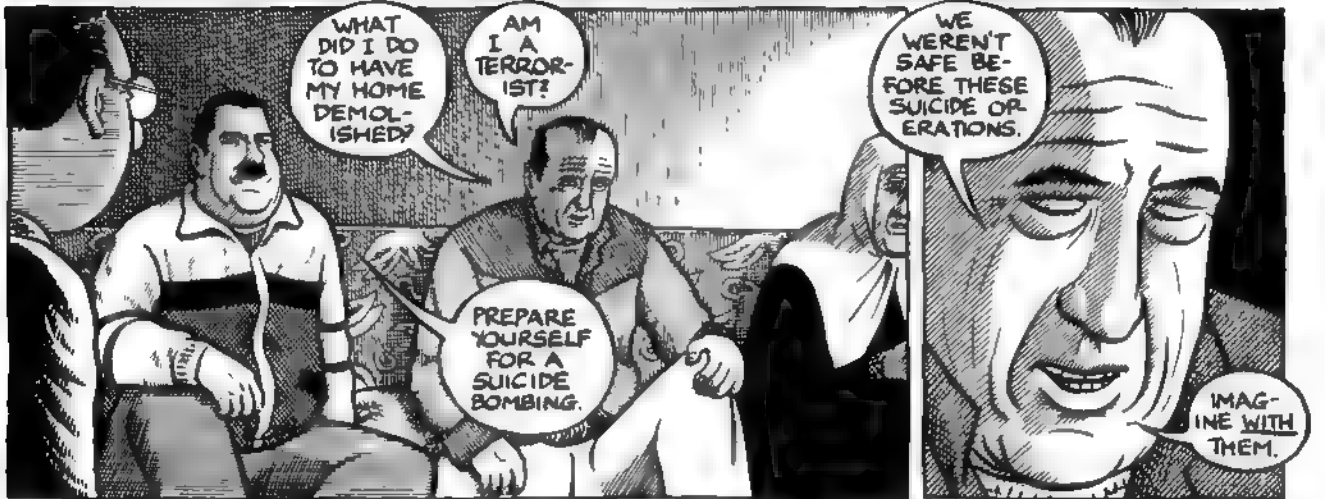
HE REMINDS YOU OF MANY BAD THINGS.



But Wasfeya is lost in thoughts of her father.

I HARDLY KNEW HIM.





THE WILL OF GOD



His son listens to our interview with growing agitation. Finally —



But before we reach the door, he stops me at a poster.





Like the
man's
father
told us,
events
are con-
tinuous.

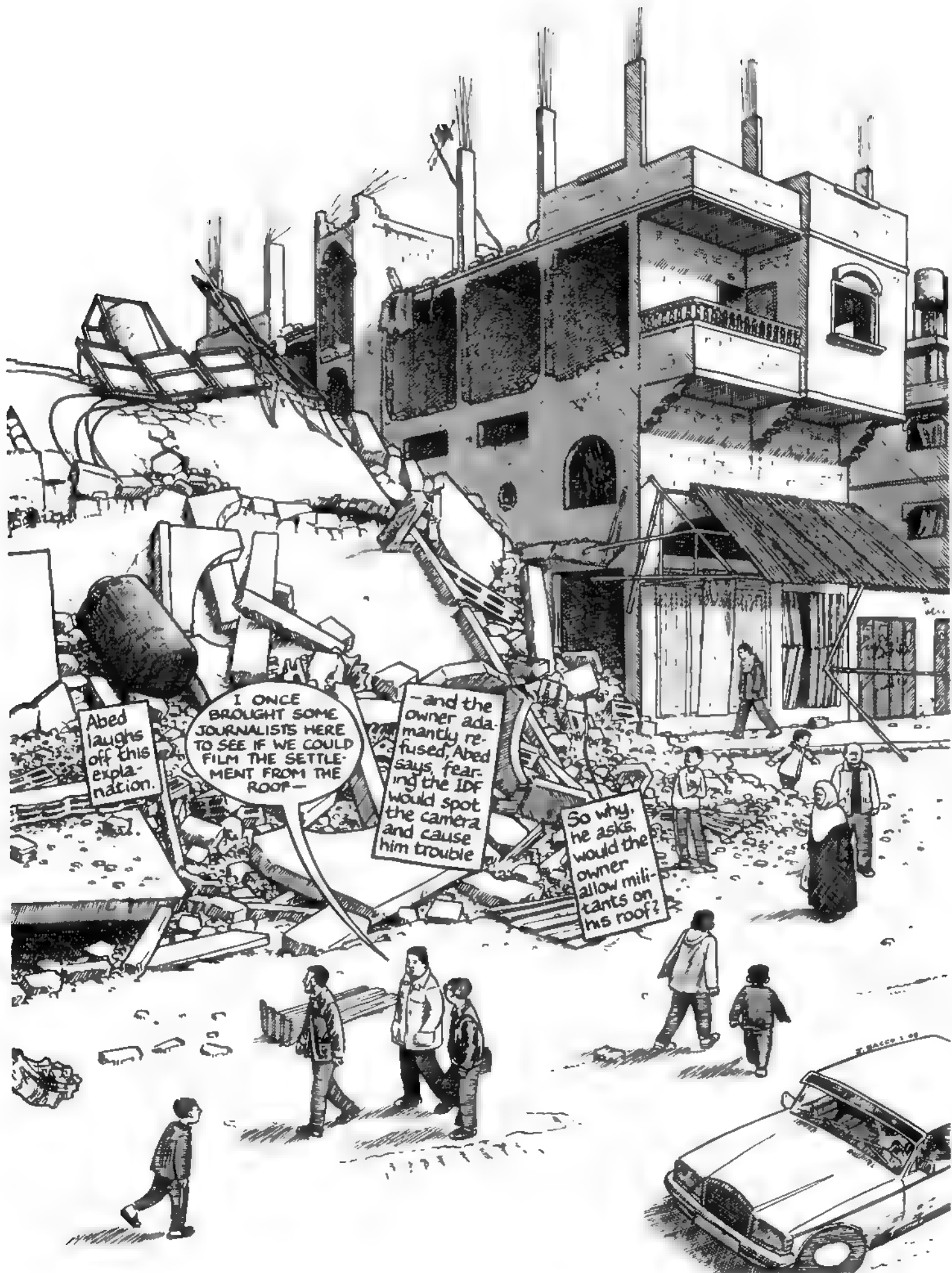
Last night
the Israelis
attacked
Bureij camp
several kil-
ometers
away and
killed eight;
the night
before they
attacked
Khan Younis
and killed two...

In the morn-
ing Abed,
Khaled, and
I go see
the damage
to Khan
Younis.

An eight-
story build-
ing, the
largest in
the Toufieh
neighbor-
hood, was
imploded
by the IDF.

The Israelis
say it was
used as an
observation
post for mili-
tants firing
into a near-
by IDF po-
sition.



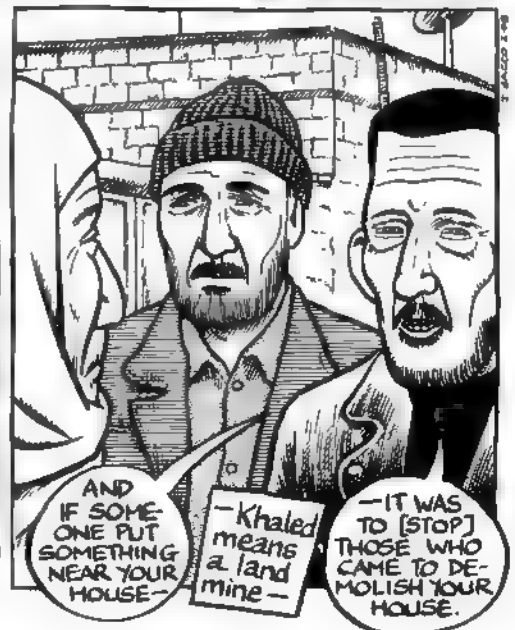
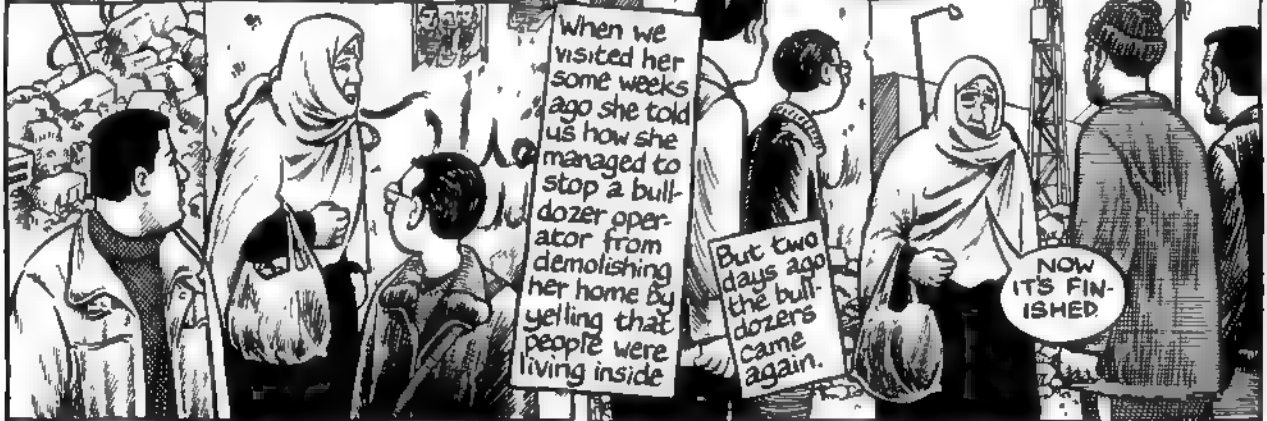








Abed recognizes a woman shuffling by.





We walk to the hospital grounds, which were breached by Israeli armor.

Khaled tells me that a boy of eight or nine was killed after the funeral for the two people killed the day before.

He'd gone to throw stones at a military position, and an Israeli soldier shot him in the head, Khaled says.

In fact, here comes a truck blasting the time of the boy's funeral.

DO YOU WANT TO TAKE A PICTURE OF THE MARTYR?

LIKE GO INTO THE MORGUE AND TAKE A PICTURE?

YES.

YOU CAN, IF YOU'D LIKE.

NO, REALLY, THAT'S FINE.

After all, what right do I have to intimacy with the poor kid's corpse? Only time, history, the bone-bleaching years can strip the dead of their privacy and make them sufficiently decent for viewing.

It's time to get back to Rafah and 1956

THE SCHOOLYARD



But the headmaster is otherwise occupied.

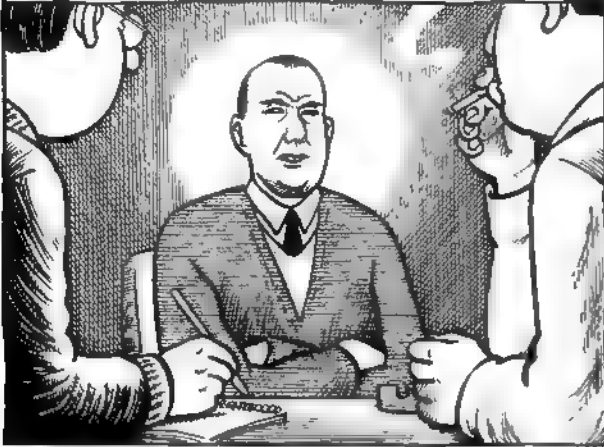


After some minutes, the business in the office concluded, the headmaster invites us in.

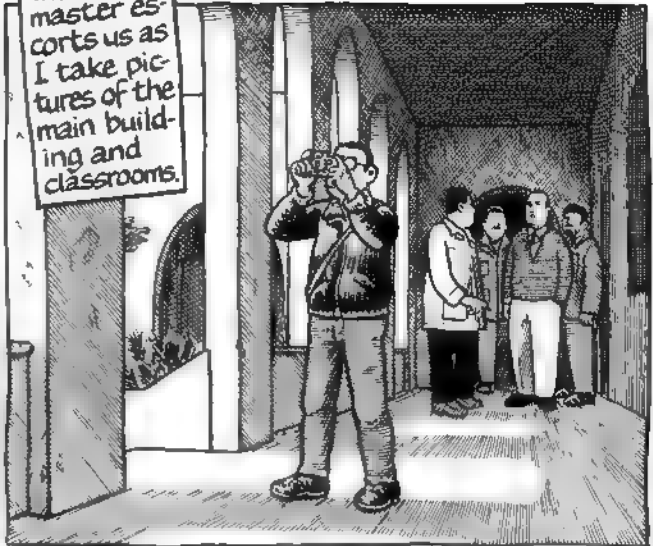


J. SACCO 3-108

Of course, he says the boys are taught about The Day of the School. On each anniversary he explains how the men were beaten at the gate.



The headmaster escorts us as I take pictures of the main building and classrooms.



Someone introduces the school gardener, Abdullah.

He was here that day in 1956. He was only 12, he says.

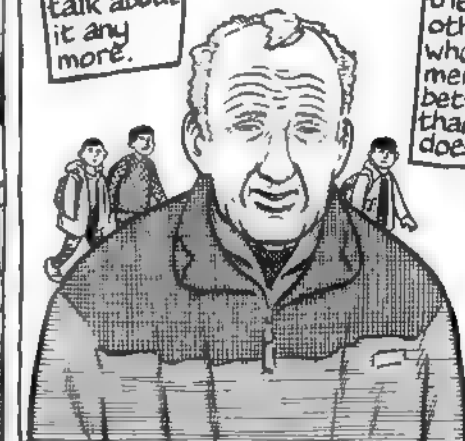
BUT WHY WERE YOU IN THE SCHOOL? YOU WERE BENEATH THE AGE.

I WAS AFRAID TO STAY AT HOME



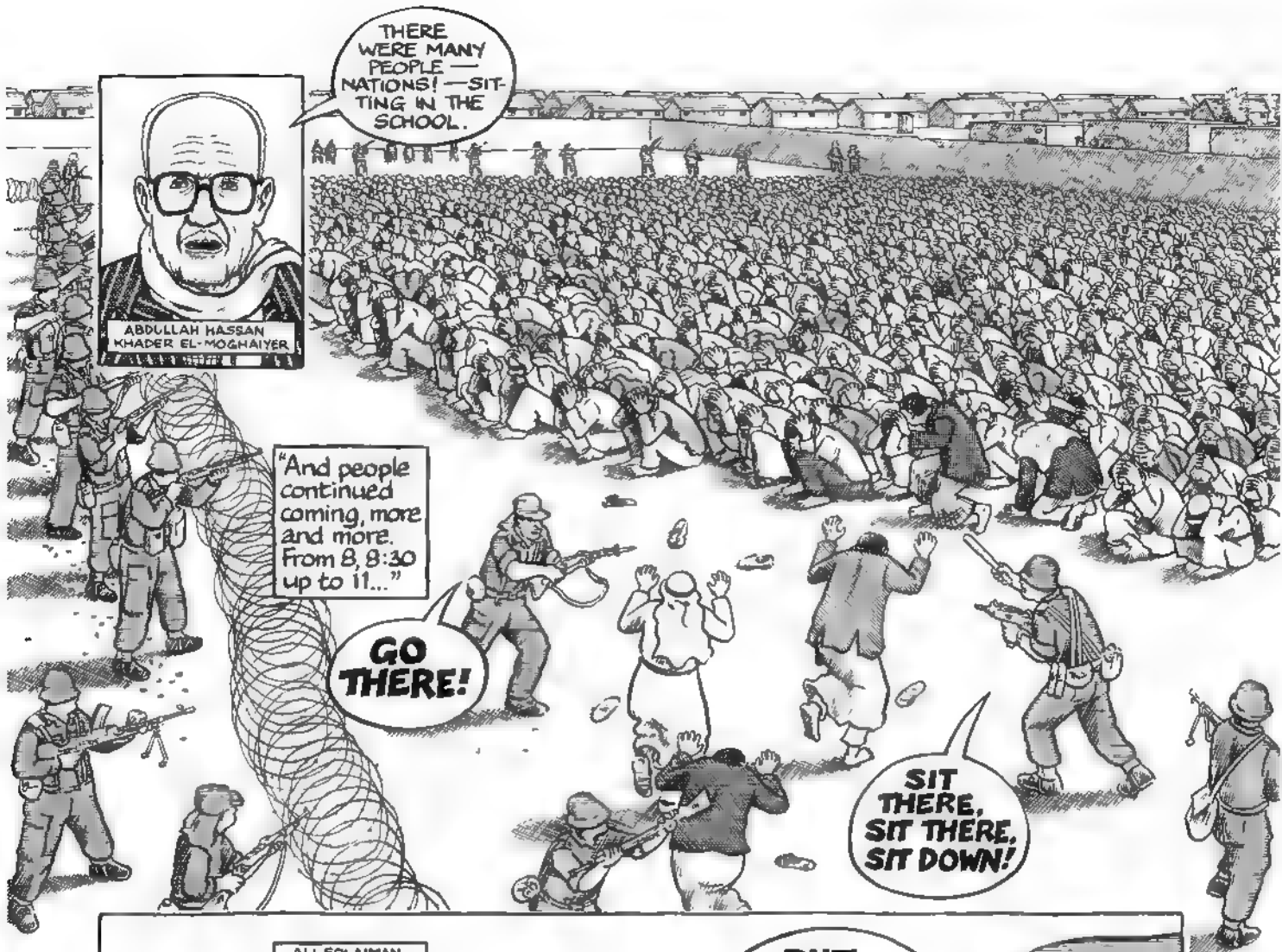
He doesn't want to talk about it any more.

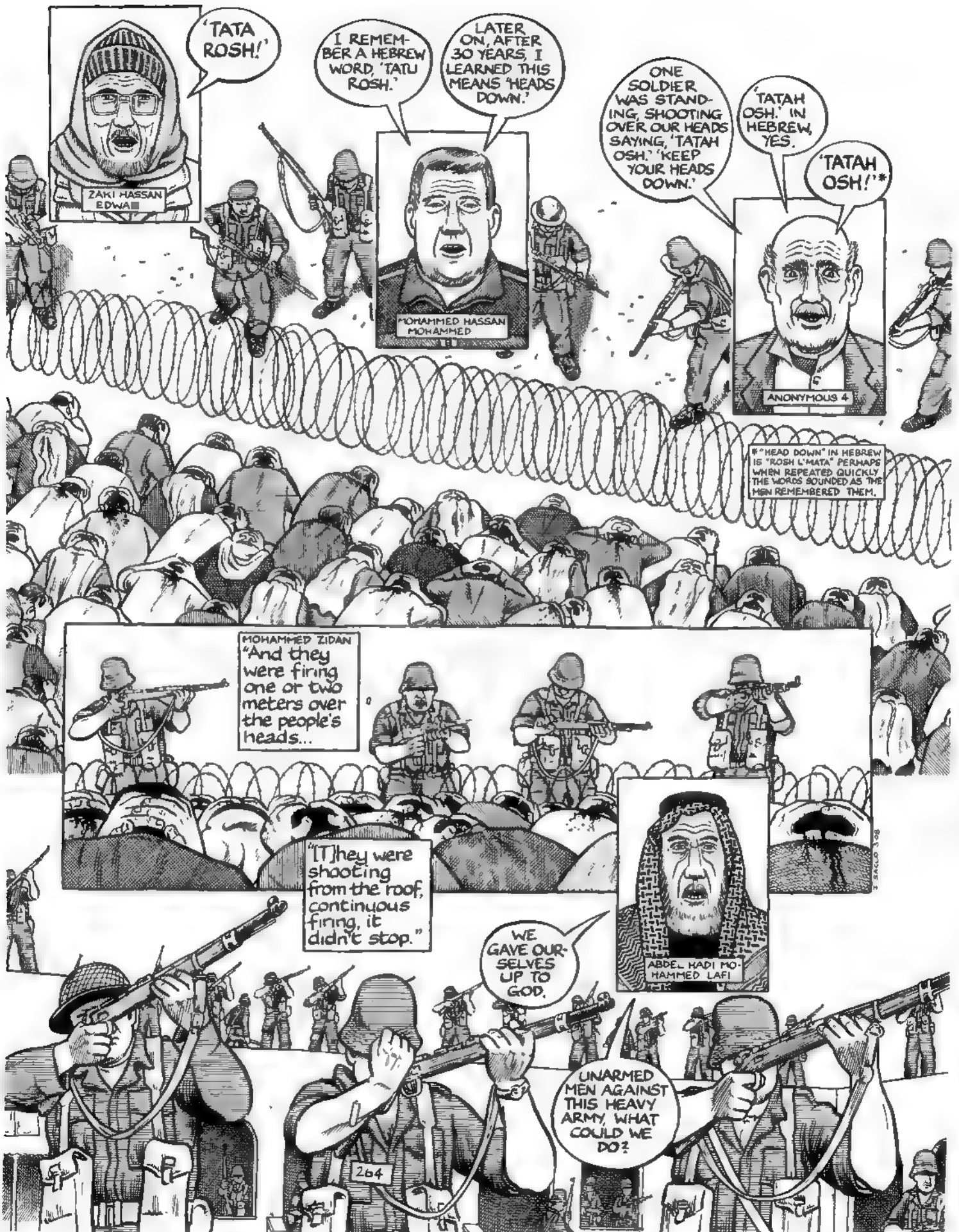
He says there are others who remember better than he does.



J. Sacco 1/08







'TATA ROSH!'

I REMEMBER A HEBREW WORD, 'TATU ROSH.'

LATER ON, AFTER 30 YEARS, I LEARNED THIS MEANS 'HEADS DOWN.'

ONE SOLDIER WAS STANDING, SHOOTING OVER OUR HEADS SAYING, 'TATAH OSH.' 'KEEP YOUR HEADS DOWN.'

'TATAH OSH.' IN HEBREW, YES.

'TATAH OSH!'

ZAKI HASSAN EDWAN

MOHAMMED HASSAN MOHAMMED

ANONYMOUS 4

*"HEAD DOWN" IN HEBREW IS "ROSH L'MATA" PERHAPS WHEN REPEATED QUICKLY THE WORDS SOUNDED AS THE MEN REMEMBERED THEM.

MOHAMMED ZIDAN
'And they were firing one or two meters over the people's heads...'

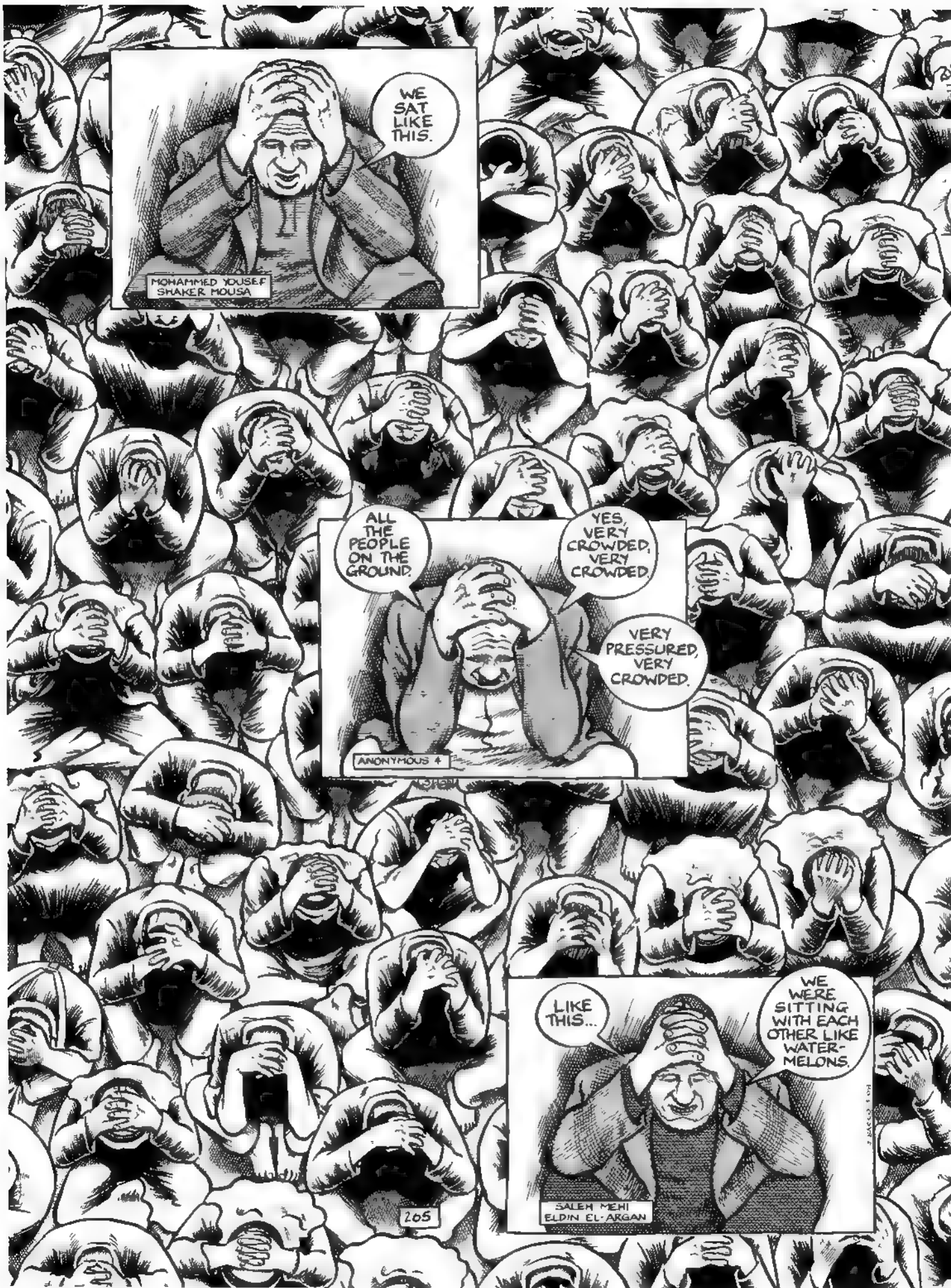
'[T]hey were shooting from the roof, continuous firing, it didn't stop.'

WE GAVE OURSELVES UP TO GOD.

UNARMED MEN AGAINST THIS HEAVY ARMY, WHAT COULD WE DO?

ABDEL HADI MOHAMMED LAFI

264





ABDEL HADI MOHAMMED LAFI

AND SOME OF THE PEOPLE INSIDE THE SCHOOL WERE INJURED, AND THEIR BLOOD WAS FLOWING.

I SMELT SOMETHING. I FOUND OUT THAT THE SMELL CAME FROM THE BLOOD OF THE PEOPLE AROUND ME...

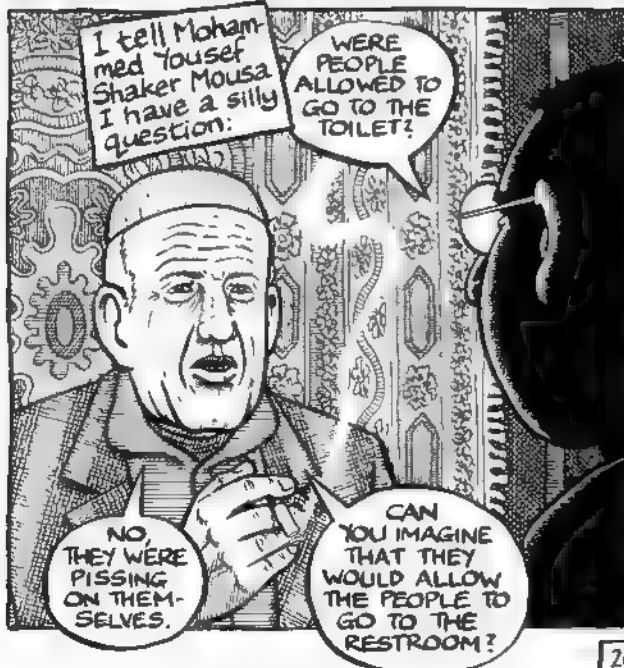
AYESH ABDEL-KHALIK YOUNIS



I KNOW ONE MAN, HE WAS FROM MY VILLAGE...

HE WAS BLEEDING FROM HIS HEAD, AND WE TRIED TO FILL HIS WOUND WITH SAND TO STOP THE BLEEDING.

MOHAMMED JUMA EL-GHOUL



I tell Mohamed Yousef Shaker Mousa I have a silly question:

WERE PEOPLE ALLOWED TO GO TO THE TOILET?

NO, THEY WERE PISSING ON THEMSELVES.

CAN YOU IMAGINE THAT THEY WOULD ALLOW THE PEOPLE TO GO TO THE RESTROOM?



El-Sayed Abdel Ramad Abu Taha grabs his grandson to demonstrate.

OUR HEADS WERE ON THE BACKS OF THE ONES IN FRONT OF US, AND WE PISSED ON [THEM].



AHMED HASSAN
EDWAN

WE
WERE SIT-
TING WITH OUR
HEADS DOWN, AND
ME, I WASN'T ABLE
TO [GO] PISS, SO I
PISSSED ON THE
GROUND AND ON
MYSELF



"In front
of all the
people I
pissed."



WHILE WE WERE
SITTING IN THIS
WAY, WE PISSSED
ON EACH OTHER.

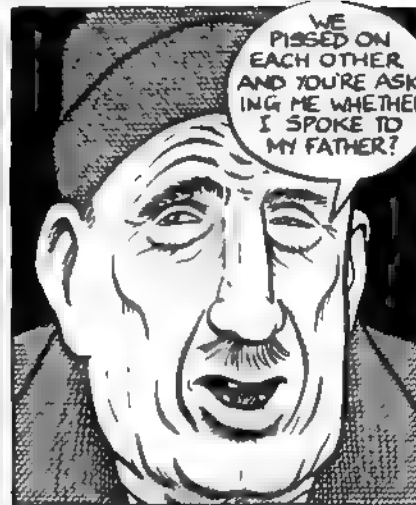
WERE YOU SIT-
TING WITH YOUR
FATHER THE WHOLE
TIME?

MOHI EL DIN
IBRAHIM LAFI



YES, YES OUR
HEADS IN THE
OTHER ONE'S
ASS

DID
YOU SPEAK
TO YOUR
FATHER?



WE
PISSSED ON
EACH OTHER
AND YOU'RE ASK-
ING ME WHETHER
I SPOKE TO
MY FATHER?

NO ONE
ALLOWED TO
STAND UP NOH-
ING OFFERED TO
THEM. NOTHING
AT ALL. NO
WATER, NO
FOOD

NOTHING
NOTHING.
NOTHING.
NOTHING.



MUHAMMED YOUSEF
SHAKER MOUSA

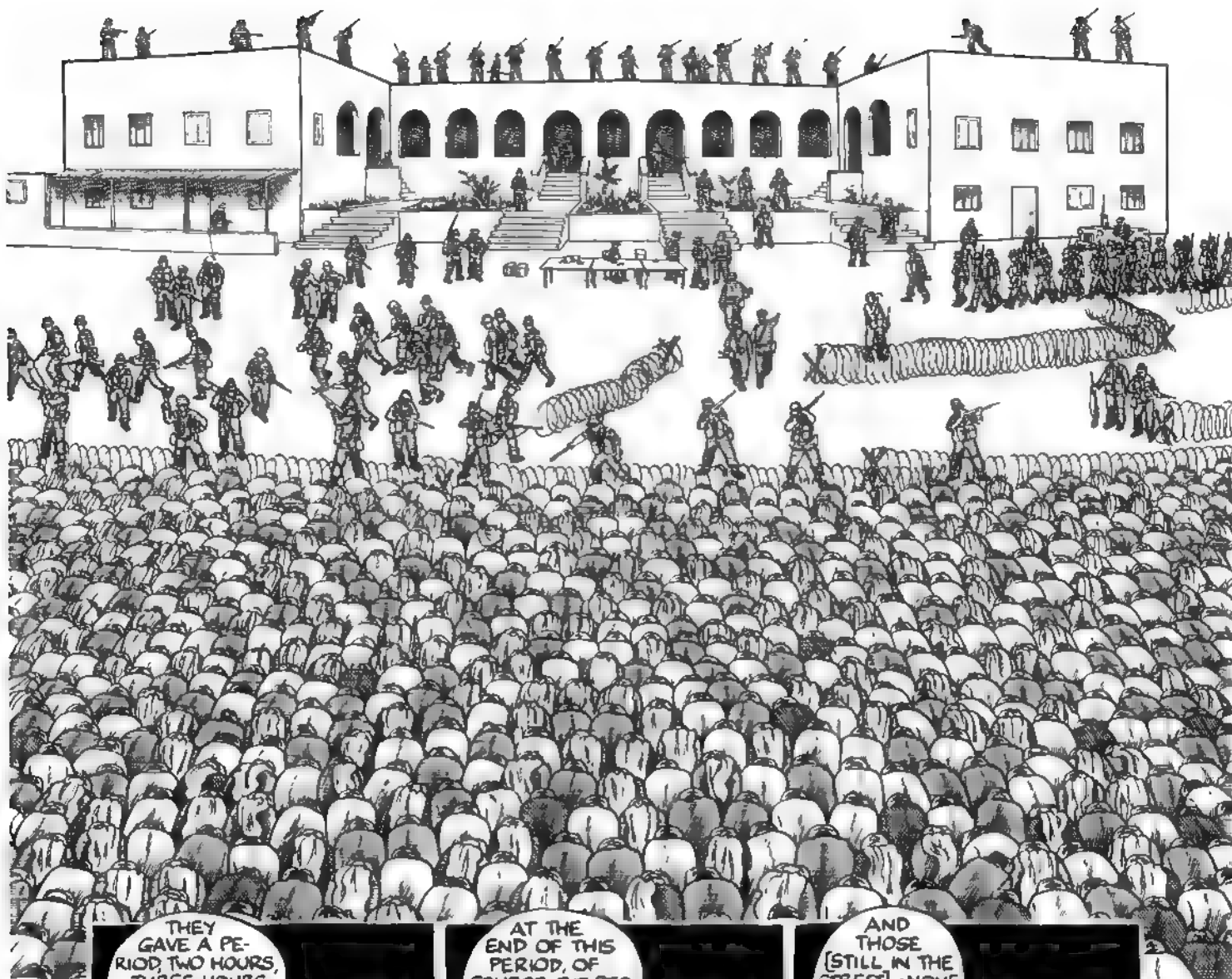
AND
ANYONE
WHO TRIED
TO SMOKE, THEY
SHOUTED AT
HIM TO
STOP



WE
SPENT
THE WHOLE
DAY WITH-
OUT WATER,
WITHOUT
FOOD.



ZAKI HASSAN
EDWAN



THEY
GAVE A PE-
RIOD, TWO HOURS,
THREE HOURS,
FOR THE PEOPLE
TO GATHER

AT THE
END OF THIS
PERIOD, OF
COURSE, THE PEOP
LE STOPPED
COMING ..

AND
THOSE
[STILL IN THE
STREET]—NONE
OF THEM SUR-
VIVED

AYESH ABDEL-
KHALIK YOUNIS

J. SALCO 4 03

In the meantime, what was going on outside the school?

THE SEARCH

We circle around it looking for older ladies who we hope can fill us in.

And in one of Shaboura's back alleys, we discover Ra'esa Salim Hassan Kaloob selling sweets at a make-shift stall.

Sure she remembers '56! She was a child, but she says her memory is strong.

She entrusts her goods to some grandkids and takes us to the house of an obliging neighbor

The women there are cracking up, giggling. We're the most fun they've had in ages. And they're the most fun we've had, too!

Gone are the formalities, the solemnity! In fact, the entire tea-and-coffee-serving spectacle is eliminated because — well, the women are out here with us, not in the kitchen boiling water.

Ra'esa says her brother, a Palestinian soldier, went to the school as ordered.



I LEFT THE HOUSE AND NO ONE PREVENTED ME — MY MOTHER WAS A VERY OLD WOMAN AND I WAS THE OLDEST OF MY SISTERS.

SO I WENT TO THE WALL OF THE SCHOOL.

MAYBE THREE GIRLS WERE WITH ME.



"I saw all the men sitting, their heads down, and the Jews among them walking, going and coming.

"Anyone who moved was beaten.



"They were firing over their heads, and they told them, "

TATA ROSH, IHMAR!



Soldiers ordered the girls away, but "we came and went many times.



*"IHMAR": YOU DONKEYS

"The women weren't able to leave their houses at first, but when they saw me running and walking in the streets they became stronger and went out."



I WASN'T AFRAID.

AND I'M [STILL] NOT AFRAID. I'M STRONG



WERE THERE MANY WOMEN IN THE STREETS?

"Yes, many women, many kids. Holding black flags."



They ran after their men until they reached this area, screaming and shouting"

A few doors down from Raiesas stand, we find Deeba Jamil El-Talili, who also remembers.

MY HUSBAND AND HIS THREE BROTHERS WENT TO THE SCHOOL WHEN THEY HEARD THE LOUD-SPEAKERS.

WE STARTED TO SCREAM AND SHOUT AT THE SOLDIERS.



"They pushed us back telling us,

GO HOME! GO HOME!



"[A soldier] pushed us inside and closed the door.

"[Later] we went outside again."





"We stood at the end of Fatima El-Khateeb Street, and when they shot at us we went up the street and then came back."



WERE THEY SHOOTING AT YOU OR OVER YOUR HEADS?



WE OPENED THE DOOR FOR THEM AND THEY ENTERED.

FIVE CAME.

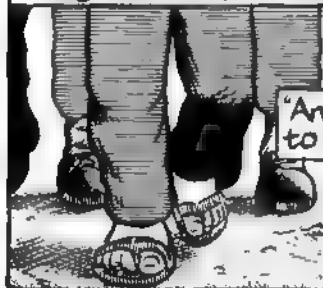








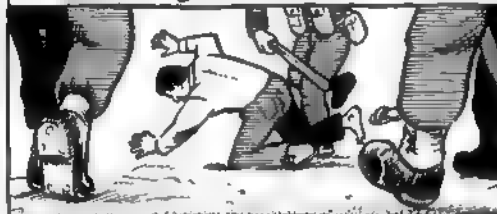
"They took me from the room."



"We walked for awhile..."



"One of the soldiers tried to hit me with a heavy stick..."



"I fell and it hit me on my back."



"The same officer told the soldiers not to touch me."

"He took me to an area and there were many men... with their faces on the ground. It was an open area... and the soldiers surrounded them."



"All [the prisoners] were old men. I was the youngest among them. I was 21 years old."

"We spent about an hour or an hour and a half."

"When they finished searching in the camp, the same officer came back...and they started to ask each of us,



"They were letting the old men leave. Only three of us remained."



Ghanim was taken to one of two alternative gathering points, distinct from the government school, for further screening.

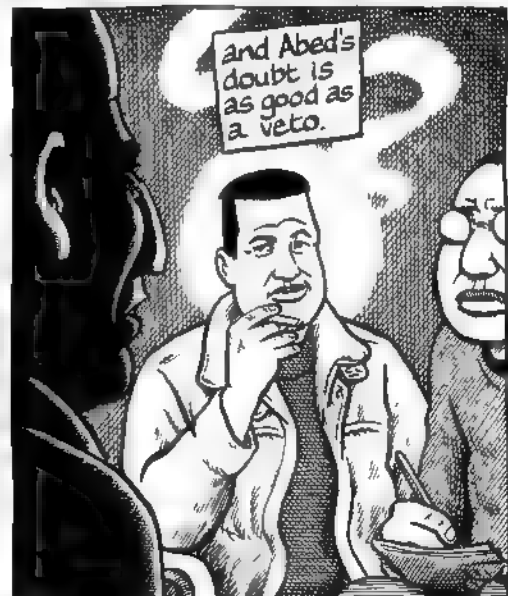
Abed and I hear many stories of men being found in the camp and shot.



Over and over again we are told the story of one Mohammed Thabit, a school teacher discovered hiding at home — some say dressed in women's clothing — and shot by Israeli soldiers.



We also hear of killings of groups of men who left for the school late. But we want an eyewitness.



Who decides what is credible and what is not?

Abed and I, that's who, sitting in our room drinking coffee.

We decide.

We edit.

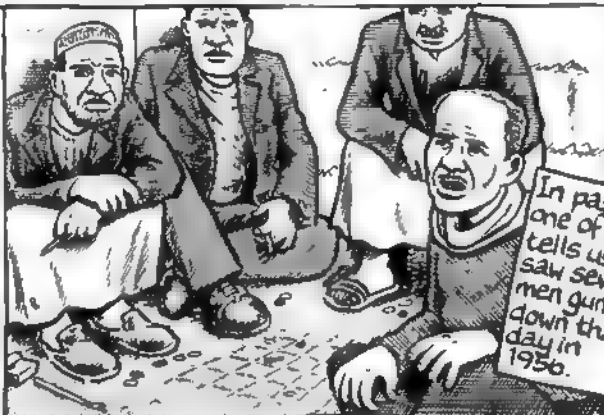
We determine

In the absence of UNRWA records, of Israeli records — and could we rely on them if we had them? — it's up to us to fill history's glass with as much truthful, cogent testimony as we can.



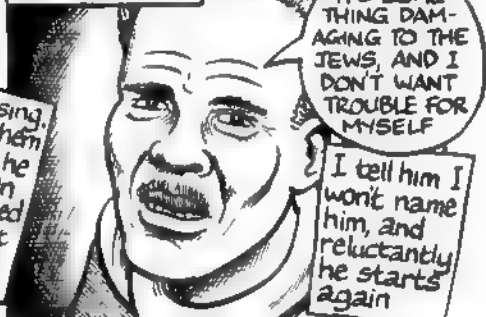
If some truth spills along the way, we apologize.

Anyway, one day, after we've moved on from this part of the story, we come across four black Palestinians, perhaps the descendants of Turkish slaves, playing a game with stones in the sand.



In passing, one of them tells us he saw seven men gunned down that day in 1956.

When I take out my notepad and ask him to repeat the story, he hesitates.



IT'S SOMETHING DAMAGING TO THE JEWS, AND I DON'T WANT TROUBLE FOR MYSELF

I tell him I won't name him, and reluctantly he starts again

"They entered our house and searched it... They said to my grandfather,



YOU ARE YOUNG WHY DIDN'T YOU GO TO THE SCHOOL?

YOUR ID?

"He looked at the ID and asked the soldiers to take [my grandfather] to the school and check if the age was right or wrong.



"My brother and I secretly followed the soldiers and my grandfather.



"Near the sanitation department we found seven men lined up against the wall with their hands over their heads.



"Now we stopped."

"There was an old woman on the street looking for her son, who had gone to the school."

"And the old woman stopped also."



"The woman fell down on the ground to her hands and knees..."



AFTER HALF AN HOUR MY GRANDFATHER CAME BACK WITH THE SOLDIERS BECAUSE THEY HAD FOUND HE WAS OLDER THAN THE [WANTED] AGE.

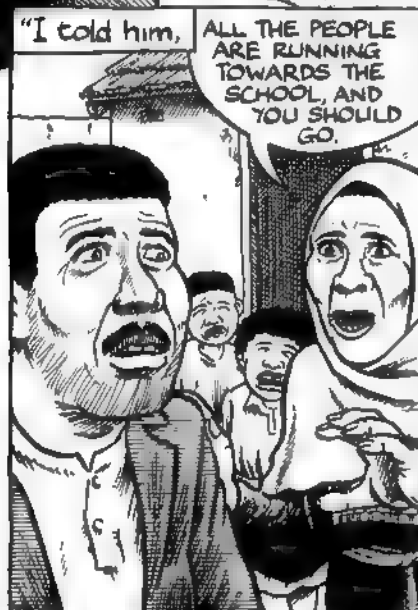
Abed and I have to take responsibility for believing or rejecting a witness.



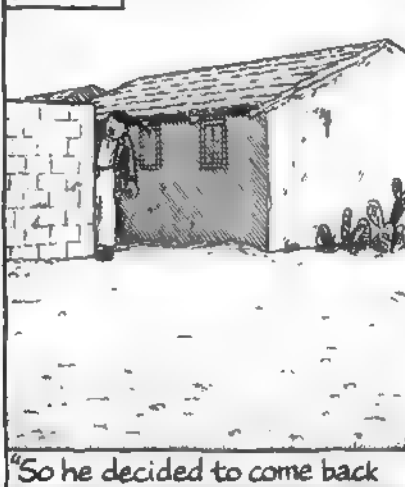
In this case we both trust our instincts and this man's story.



Soon we are sitting with Nasrah Felfel on the same spot she was living with her husband, Salem, all those years ago.



"When he went outside he didn't see any people. The men had already gone to the school..."



"So he decided to come back

"Our neighbor [also] left late. They beat our neighbor with the back of their guns, and they took him to the school..."



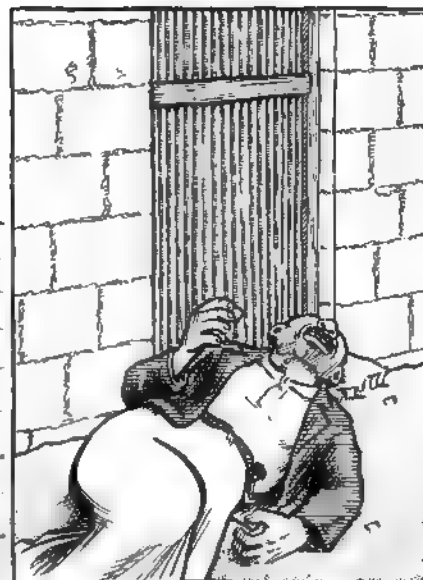


"They took my husband outside the house."



"[The children] ran after me when I followed their father. They were afraid...and they were screaming and shouting..."

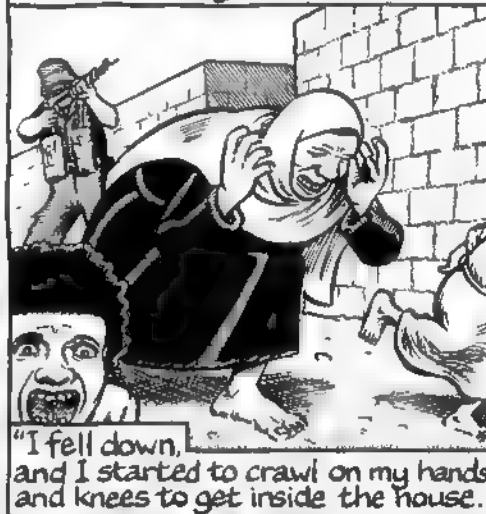




"I saw it with my eyes."

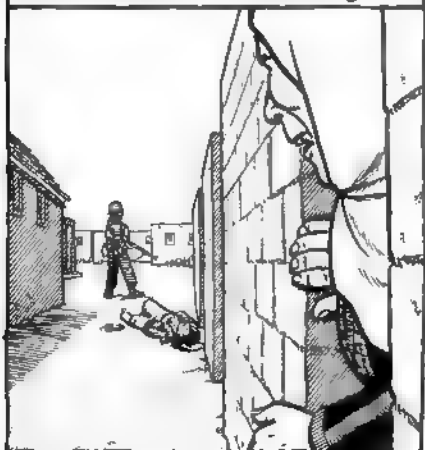


"And then they shot at us."



"I fell down, and I started to crawl on my hands and knees to get inside the house."

"I tried to go out to see the body many times...but there was a soldier at the end of the street the whole day."



"And my neighbor from time to time shouted to me,"



"DON'T GO OUT! HE'LL SHOOT YOU IF YOU LEAVE YOUR HOUSE!"



"OF COURSE THEY WERE SHOOTING EVERYWHERE,"

"AND THE BODY REMAINED IN THE STREET IN THE SAME PLACE UNTIL THE NEXT MORNING."

While we feverishly dig away at 1956, daily events are shovelled back at us, obscuring our finds, making it that much harder for our subjects to focus on the stratum in question.

100 SHEKELS

That woman we met in the last chapter, for example, 80- or 82-year-old Ta'ah Khalil Outhman... her leg was broken when her house was demolished on top of her a few days before we talked.

She lay buried in the rubble for up to an hour.

I WAS SAYING, 'THERE IS NO GOD, BUT GOD.'



Abed and I had already surveyed the apparent Israeli target, a water pumping station across the road, which was heavily damaged.

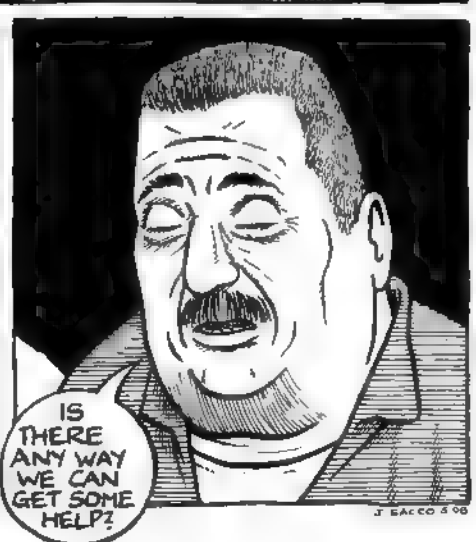
A second pumping station was completely destroyed the same night.



There was no warning.

Ta'ah awoke when the zinc roof collapsed onto her bed.

THE WHOLE HOUSE FELL DOWN ON ME...

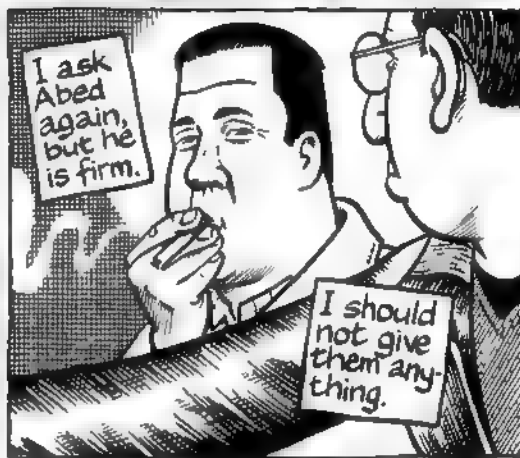


I feel terrible for these people who have lost two homes between them. I want to do something, but I don't want to overstep the bounds of Arab propriety.



SHALL I GIVE THEM SOME MONEY, OR IS IT A BAD IDEA?

IT'S A BAD IDEA



I ask Abed again, but he is firm.

I should not give them anything.



Time for us to go.



Taia's daughter-in-law follows us out and directs us to the wreckage of the old woman's house.

SHE WAS SLEEPING THERE.

HER HEAD WAS WHERE THE MIRROR IS.

I take some quick pictures, and then we beat it.

The whole street, which faces a Jewish settlement across no-man's-land, has been severely shot up and shelled.



It's a wonder that people still patch up their places and remain.



As we turn left onto Sea Street, we come across more unfortunates.



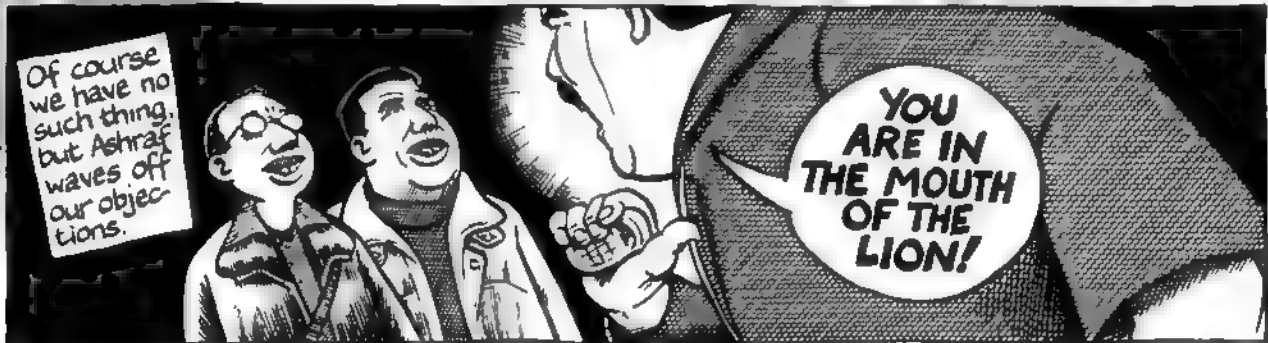
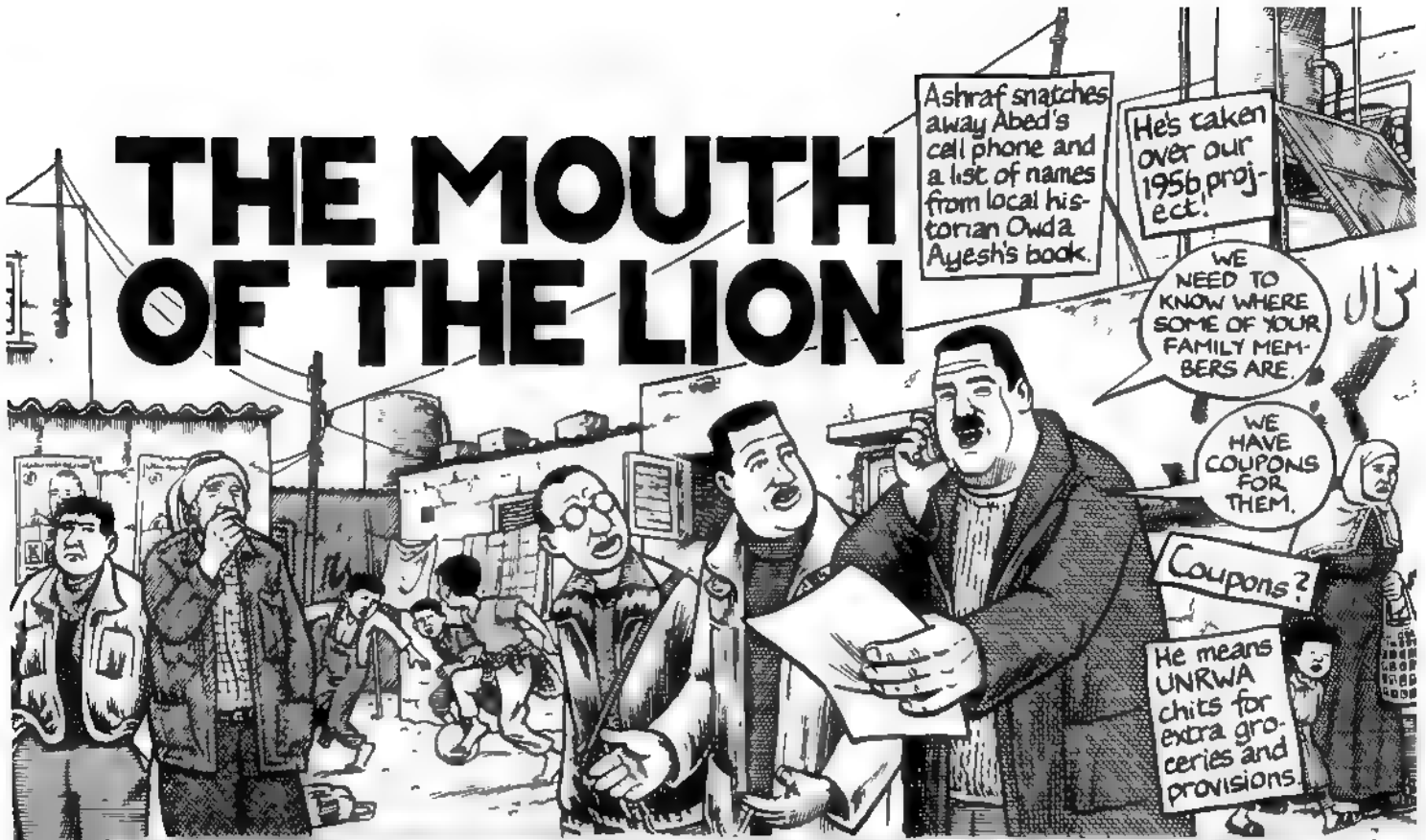
I put money in the hand of the woman, Abed or not.

She gets the dough the other people didn't get.



At least someone is happy.

THE MOUTH OF THE LION



With an efficiency Abed and I have never mustered, The Lion confronts everyone from old men —



to kids loitering under a street lamp.



He disappears into a barber shop and then pops out beaming.





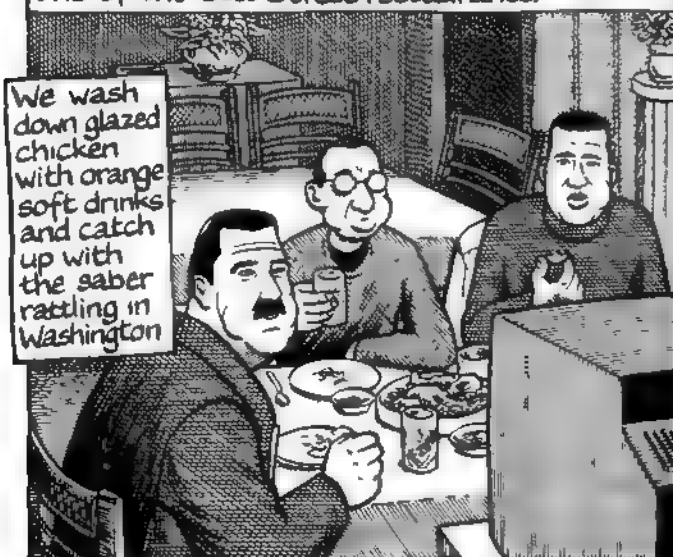
Ashraf is well known and well liked in Block J, where he seems to have his ear to the ground.



Members of the resistance court Ashraf. Now that he's "abandoned" his home along the border, they want to plant a mine inside for Israeli soldiers.



After the day's interviews, we often hole up in one of the Sea Street restaurants.



One night we leave a restaurant as the border erupts with gunfire.

The rounds seem to be smacking into Ashraf's neighborhood





We wait with Ashraf for the shooting to subside

An ambulance waits with us in case there are casualties.



At one point overhead tracer fire scatters us

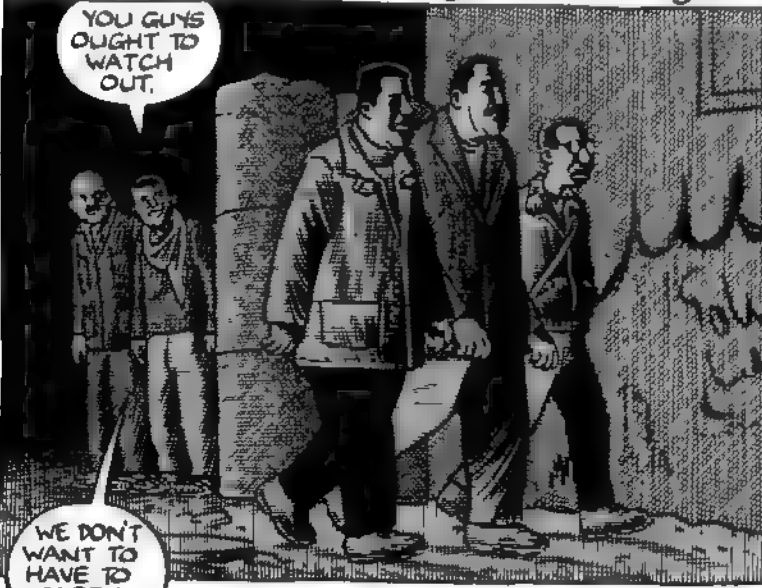
Enough. We tell Ashraf he can sleep at our place tonight.



NO, I WANT TO GO HOME

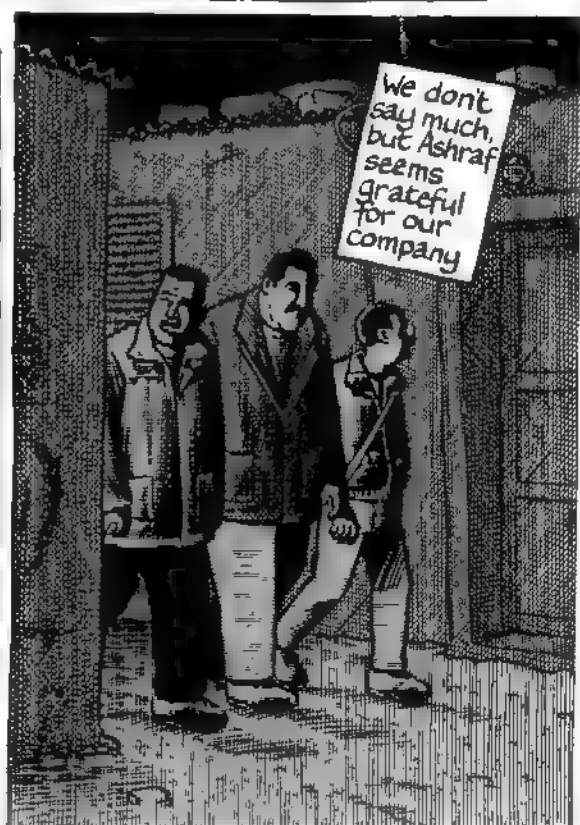
His wife and baby are in Block J. His parents, his brothers and sisters, too.

The shooting finally lets up, and Abed and I decide to accompany Ashraf home through the back alleys.

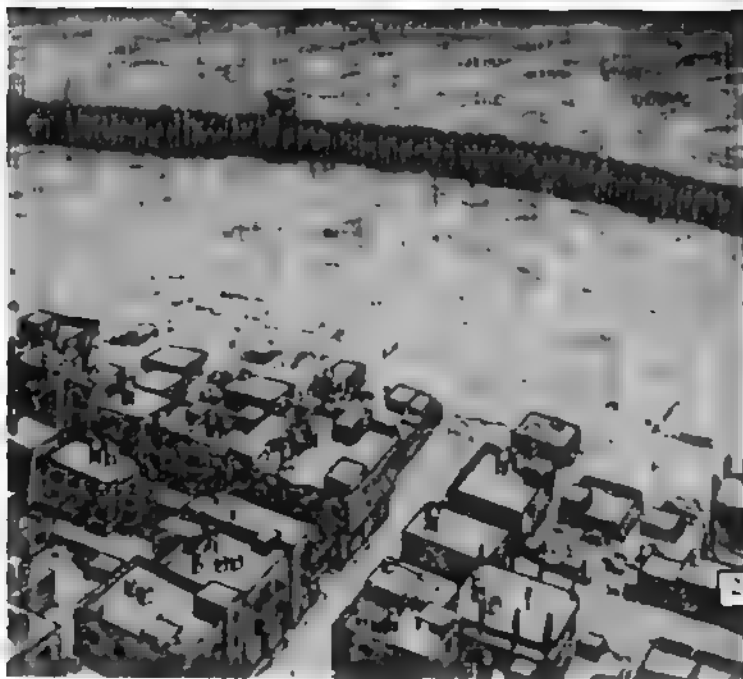
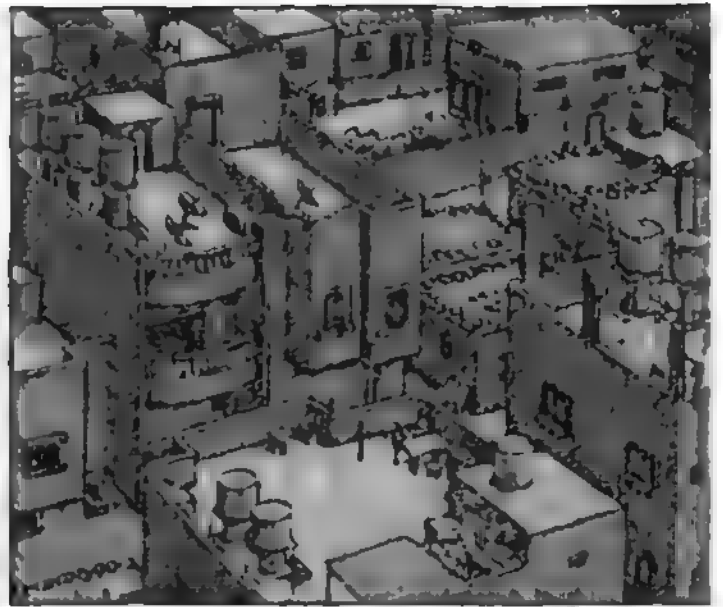
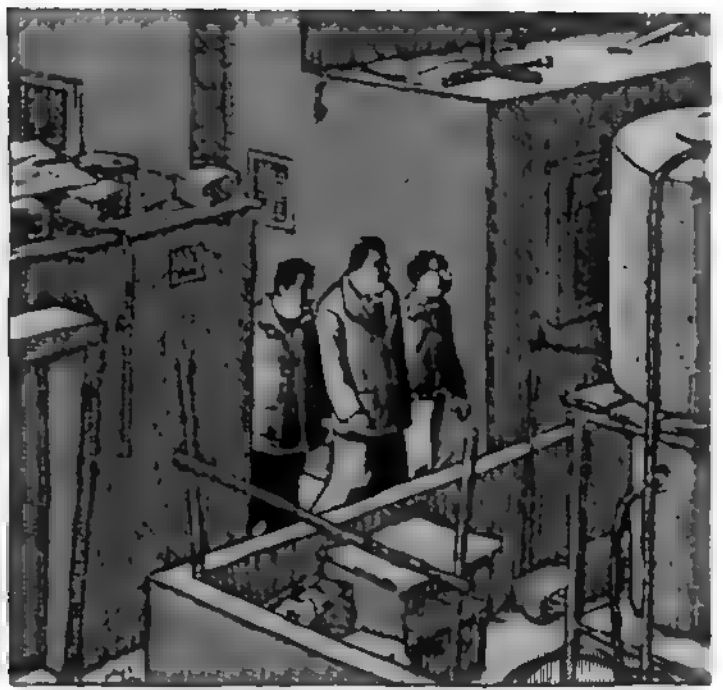


YOU GUYS OUGHT TO WATCH OUT.

WE DON'T WANT TO HAVE TO CARRY YOU.



We don't say much, but Ashraf seems grateful for our company



The taxi driver can no longer control himself, not even in front of a foreigner.

LET'S BLOW UP EVERYTHING

WE NEED TWO, THREE OPERATIONS!

BOMBS!
BOMBS!

LET'S BLOW UP EVERYTHING, AND IF THAT MEANS WAR, LET THERE BE WAR!

DAILY THEY KILL US, THEY DEMOLISH HOMES, AND MEANWHILE THERE ARE NO OPERATIONS!

SO WE NEED OPERATIONS!

Operations. That's Palestinian-speak for any attacks on Israelis, including suicide bombings.

DON'T SAY THAT. THEY MIGHT PUT YOU IN PRISON.

I DON'T CARE, I'M NOT AFRAID!

THEY KILLED A PREGNANT WOMAN YESTERDAY, AND THEY SAID THEY WERE SORRY!

ONLY THEY CAN SAY SORRY?

LET'S DO WHAT WE NEED TO DO AND SAY SORRY, TOO!

Three days later a suicide bomber kills 17 Israelis, mostly students, in Haifa

The word goes around quickly by cell phone.

THE LEGEND

Did you hear?

The next day an Israeli attack on Jabalia refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip kills 11

Eight are killed in one spot, where firemen are trying to put out a blaze.

We watch the footage over and over on the Arab stations.

Israeli shells explode amongst the firemen and onlookers

All of them are non-combatants.

We've heard
ambulances
racing by
and one rock-
et after
another hit-
ting Block J

SHAPES IN

Abed and
I turn off
Sea Street
to investi-
gate and
ask a boy
what he
knows.

THREE
WOMEN
WERE
WOUNDED
DOWN
THERE.

BUT
DON'T WALK
ON THAT
SIDE OF THE
STREET.

OKAY,
GUIDE
US.

PT.1

THE DARK

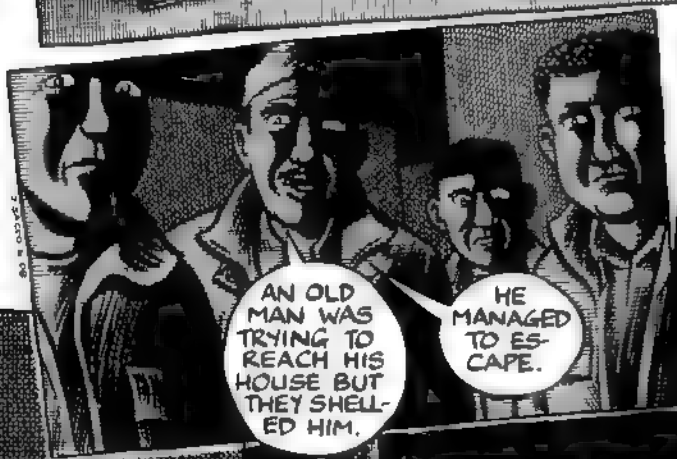
The boy leads
us, and now
we can make
out dark
shapes tak-
ing cover
behind a
corner.

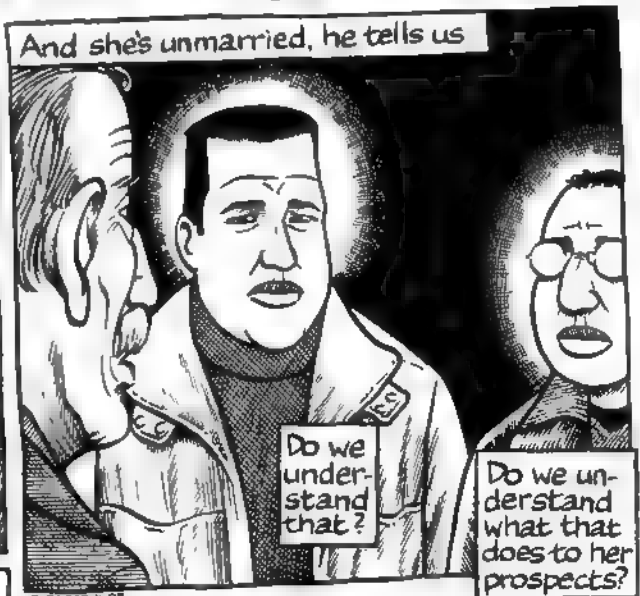
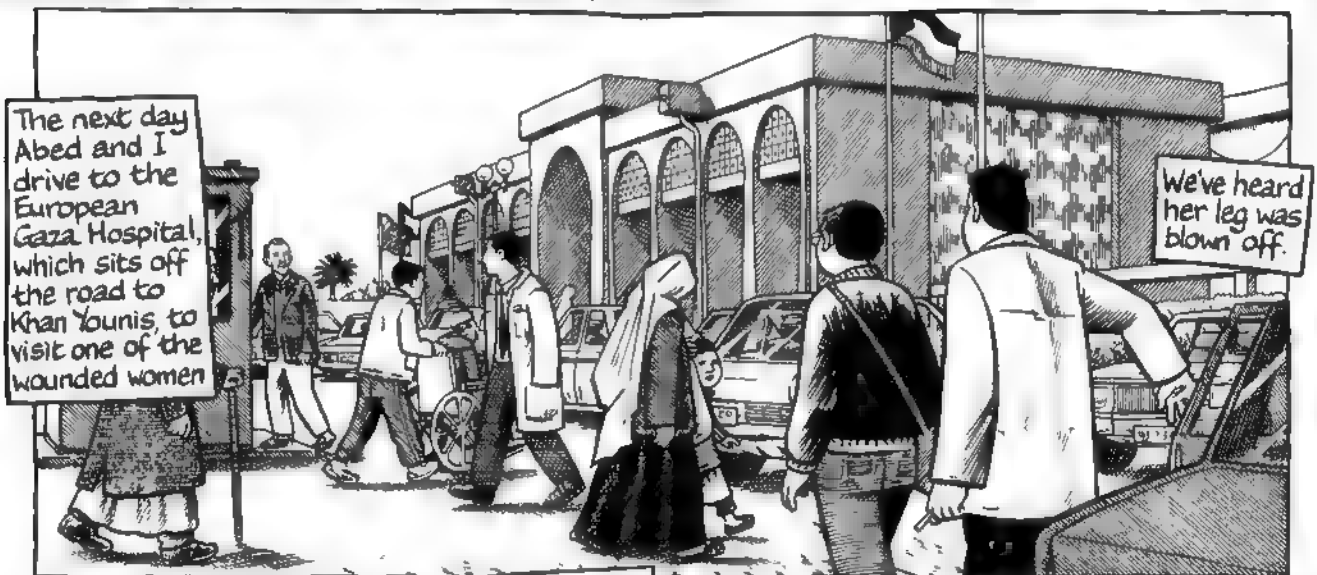
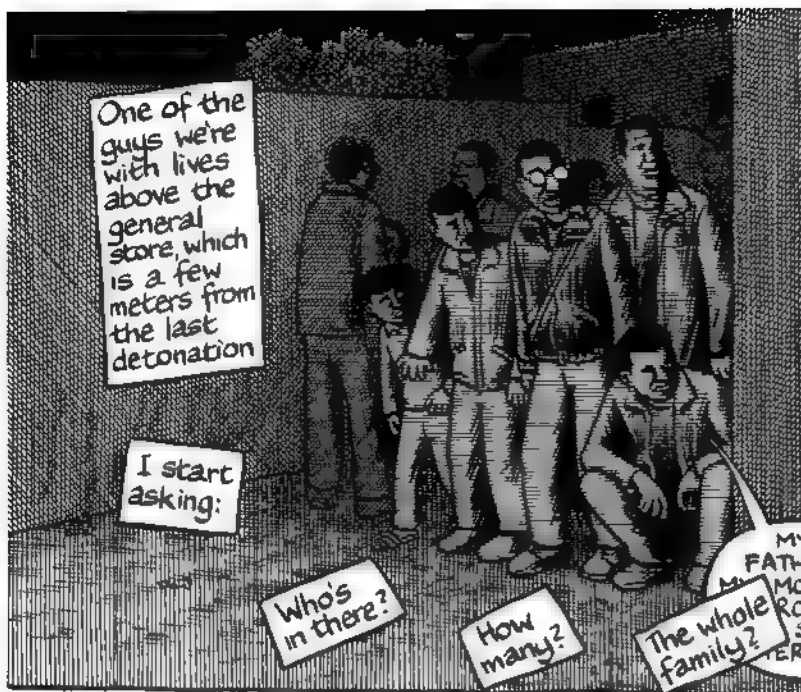
DON'T
STOP THERE
RUN ACROSS.
THERE'S A
TANK UP THE
ROAD.

We do
as we're
told.

The camp ends
straight up
the street, and
beyond that is
a deep dark.

If there
is a tank
there, we
cannot
see it.







The other wounded females are laid up at El-Najjar Hospital in Rafah

Fathia, the older sister, agrees to speak to us.

Her niece, seven-year-old Rola, is knocked out by drugs in the next bed.

Her dressing is soaked in blood.

The doctors won't operate on her badly injured leg until it stops bleeding.



That night, Fathia tells us, they had gone to shop at the market.

BEFORE WE LEFT HOME THERE HAD BEEN SOME SHOOTING.

BUT IT HAD CALMED DOWN.



As they were returning, a short distance from their house, they found themselves under fire.

"I felt something enter my flesh..."

"We stopped and ran back to the nearest door."

"I was in front, and now they started shelling."

"Uncountable shells!"

HELP ME, AUNTIE!

HELP ME!



"I looked back

"and I saw her covered in blood.

"I saw my sister on the ground.

I'VE
LOST
MY
LEG!



"She was
five or six
meters
away but
I couldn't
reach her.

"The shell-
ing was
heavy.

"Every-
one who
showed
his head
to help
my sister
was shelled."

Finally,
she says,
a brave
neighbor
pulled
her sister
into his
building,
and medics
evacuated
them over
a wall to
avoid the
rockets,
which
were still
crashing
in the
street.



I have to ask: Why are you
living along the border in
such a dangerous area?



She says
their home
in Block J
was demol-
ished two
months ago.

They then rented
in the Tal El-
Sultan neighbor-
hood, but the Is-
raelis damaged
their new apart-
ment and de-
stroyed their car
while demolishing
the home of a
neighbor.



With so many
people made
homeless by
the demoli-
tions, there
was no other
place to rent
but back in
Block J.



NOW
WE'VE
ALREADY
PAID RENT
FOR THE
MONTH.

WHERE
ELSE
ARE WE
GOING
TO GO?

One evening we are relaxing in the home of Ashraf's friend Fuad, which sits in the diciest part of Block J, on the lip of the border-area abyss.

NOT EVERY DAY

We are talking about my '56 story and the frailty of human memory.

I DON'T EVEN REMEMBER WHAT I ATE FOR BREAKFAST YESTERDAY MORNING.

Yes, yes, I tell him, warming to my latest area of expertise.

BUT YOU WOULD REMEMBER BEING BEATEN YESTERDAY MORNING.

Because, generally, that doesn't happen every day

So a beating would stand out sharply in your mind.

Which is why almost all the old men we've talked to

—even the ones whose recollections have otherwise faded—

recall that one episode, the clubbing at the school gate...

My exposition dissolves

in a barrage

of bullets and ricochets!

Israeli gunfire

is hitting

the buildings around us

and then cracks

against the upper floors.

We are relatively safe on the ground level, but I remain tensed up after the shooting stops

Because I'm not under fire every day.

My pals,

however,

go on with the conversation.

Not as if nothing has happened

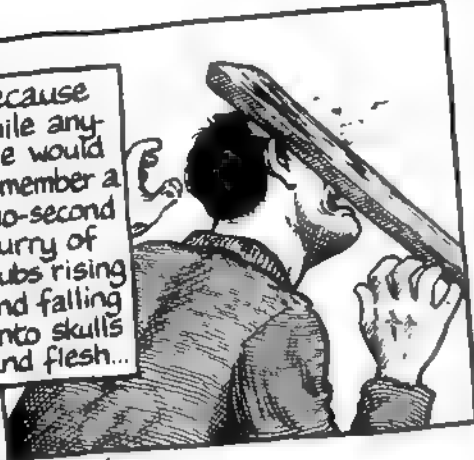
but as if

it happens often enough that it hardly merits a word.

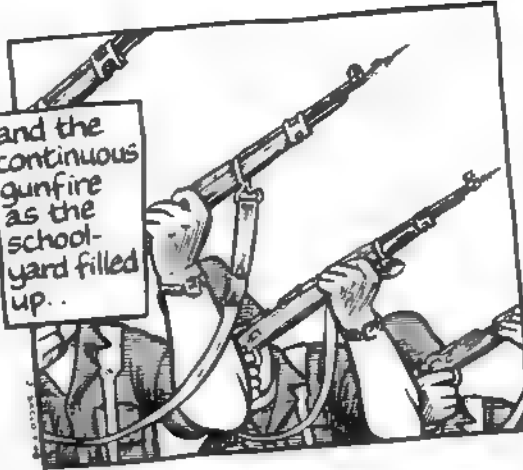
This is the part of the story that wobbles and strains.

THE SCREENING

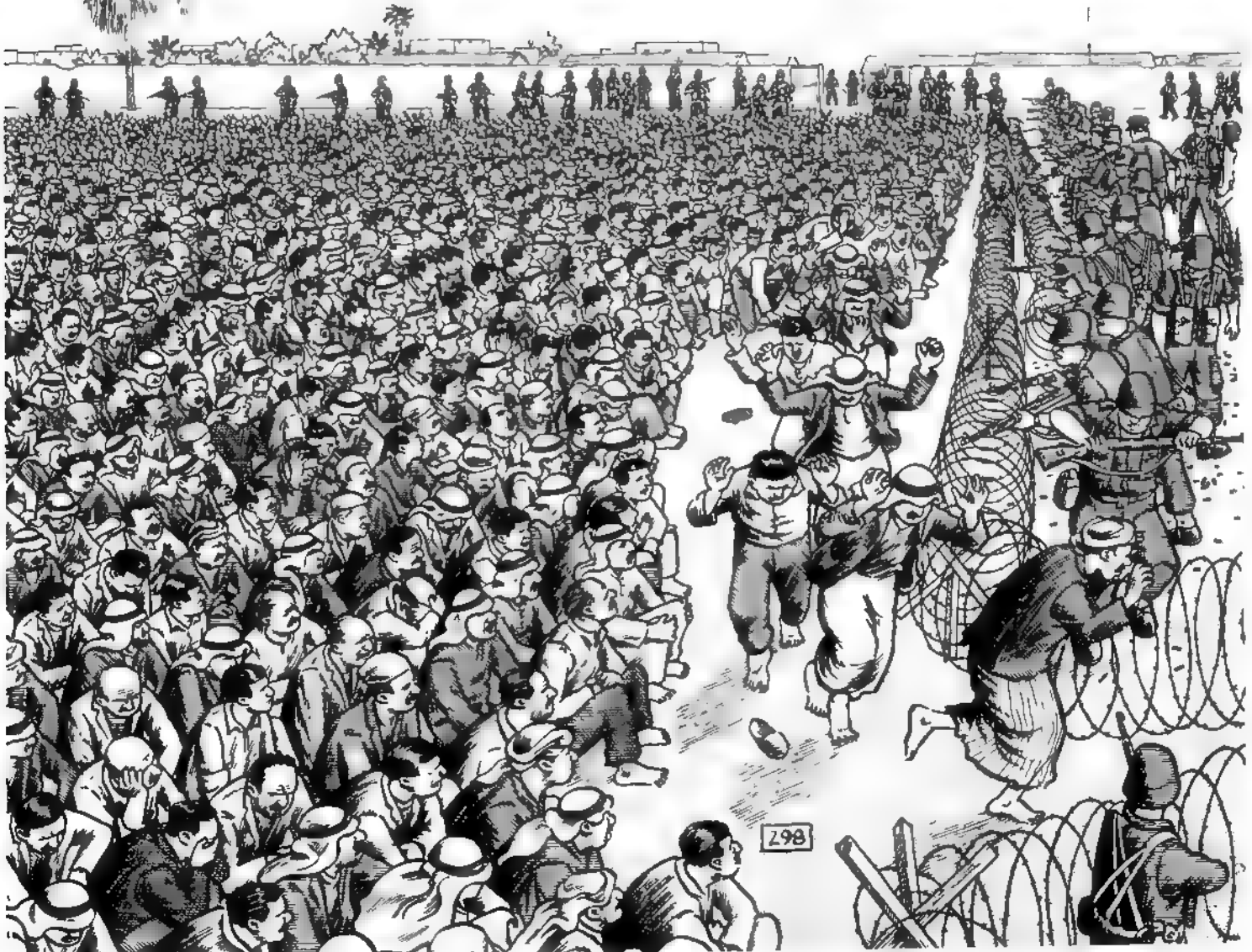
Because while any one would remember a two-second flurry of clubs rising and falling onto skulls and flesh...



and the continuous gunfire as the school-yard filled up...



what about the next eight- or ten-hour stretch when the gears shifted down to the slow, bitter, but relatively systematic sifting of men?



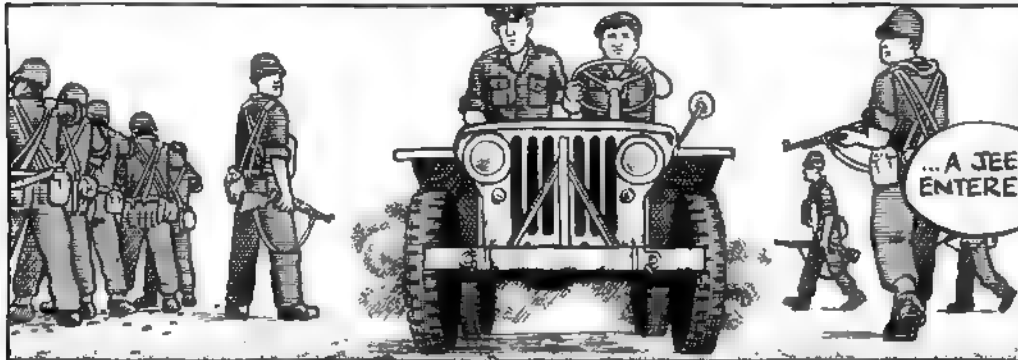
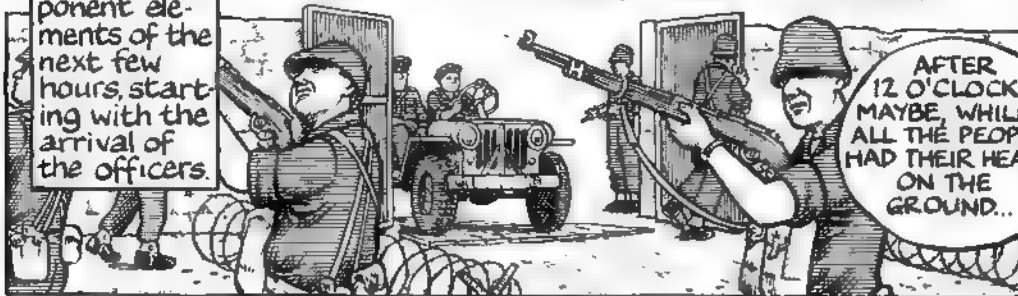
Some 50 years on, most of those we interviewed had difficulty re-assembling the drawn out events in the schoolyard.

Furthermore, few men saw or experienced precisely the same thing.



But many interviewees agreed on certain component elements of the next few hours, starting with the arrival of the officers.

THE OFFICER OR OFFICERS



AN INTERNATIONAL ONE CAME. MAYBE HE WAS ISRAELI, BUT I DON'T KNOW WHERE HE CAME FROM.



I DON'T KNOW WHETHER HE WAS A HIGH-RANKING JEWISH OR BRITISH ONE...



...I THINK HE WAS HIGH-RANKING IN THE UNITED NATIONS.



A FOREIGNER, MAYBE A BRITISH ONE ... BESIDE HIM A TRANSLATOR WHO KNEW ARABIC.



WHO THEY WERE, WE DON'T KNOW, BUT WE HEARD THAT THEY WERE BRITISH AND FRENCH.



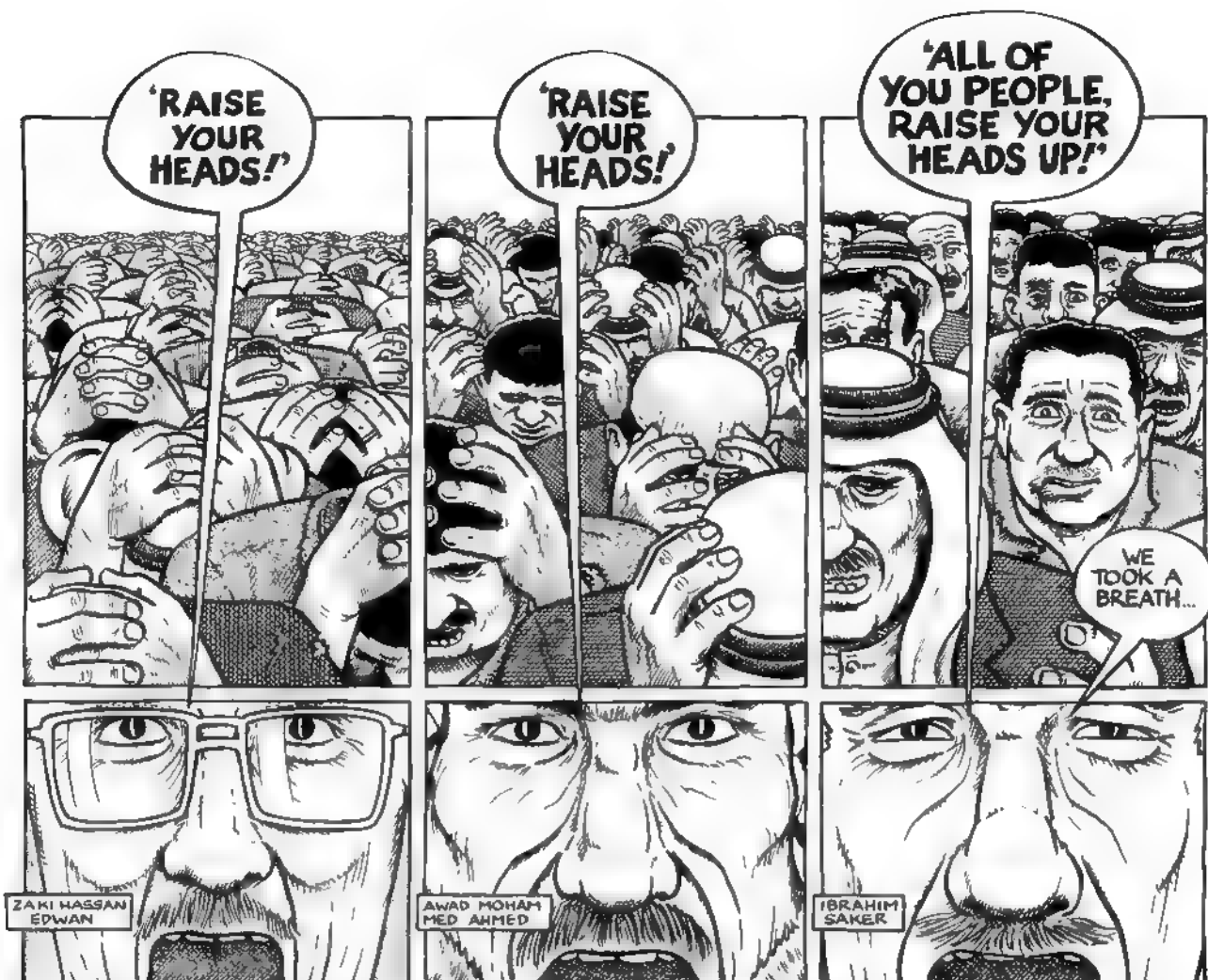
With the presence of this officer or these officers, most agree that the situation eased.

MOHAMMED ZIDAN:
"Because immediately, by a sign of his hand... the firing stopped."



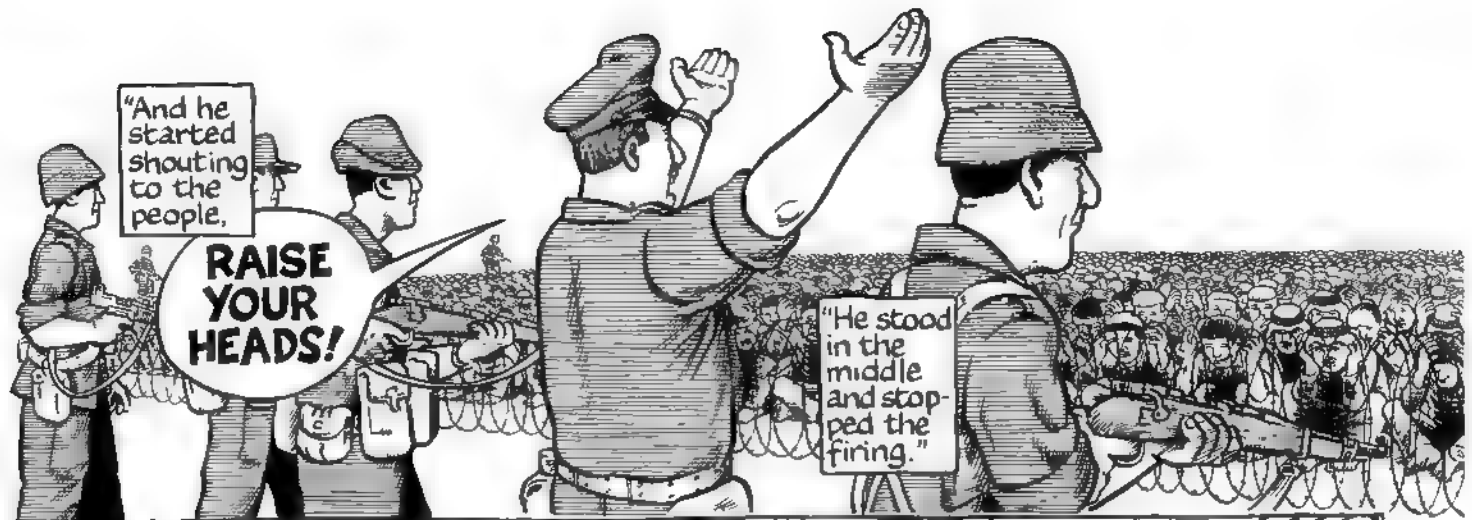
"He talked directly to the people and asked them to raise their heads."





Some attribute a more forceful persona to this mysterious figure.





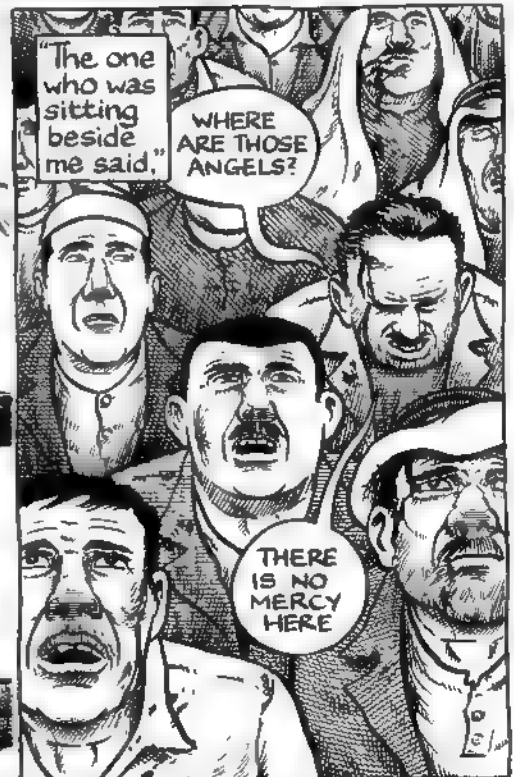
THE LEGEND OF THE DOVES



HE WAS NOT A JEW. MAYBE HE WAS BRITISH OR A FOREIGNER...



I SAW THREE DOVES FLY UP AND FLY DOWN VERY CLOSE TO US...



"I said, THESE ARE MERCIFUL ANGELS WHO'VE COME TO US."

The Israelis now began to pick out suspected Palestinian combatants.

THE CALL FOR SURRENDER



AS I REMEMBER, THEY SELECTED THE PEOPLE BY A LIST OF NAMES THEY HAD...



THEY CALLED ON SOME PEOPLE BY THEIR NAMES... HOW THEY KNEW THEIR NAMES WE DON'T KNOW

THEY TOOK THEM TO THE ROOMS OF THE SCHOOL.

MOHAMMED ZIDAN: "Each time someone entered the room we started to hear shooting inside, just to give us the idea that whoever entered the room would be killed, just to terrify us."

THEY TOOK DIFFERENT GROUPS TO DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE BUILDING.

THEY INTERROGATED THESE GROUPS IN A SERIOUS WAY AND GOT OTHER NAMES, WHICH THEY THEN CALLED.



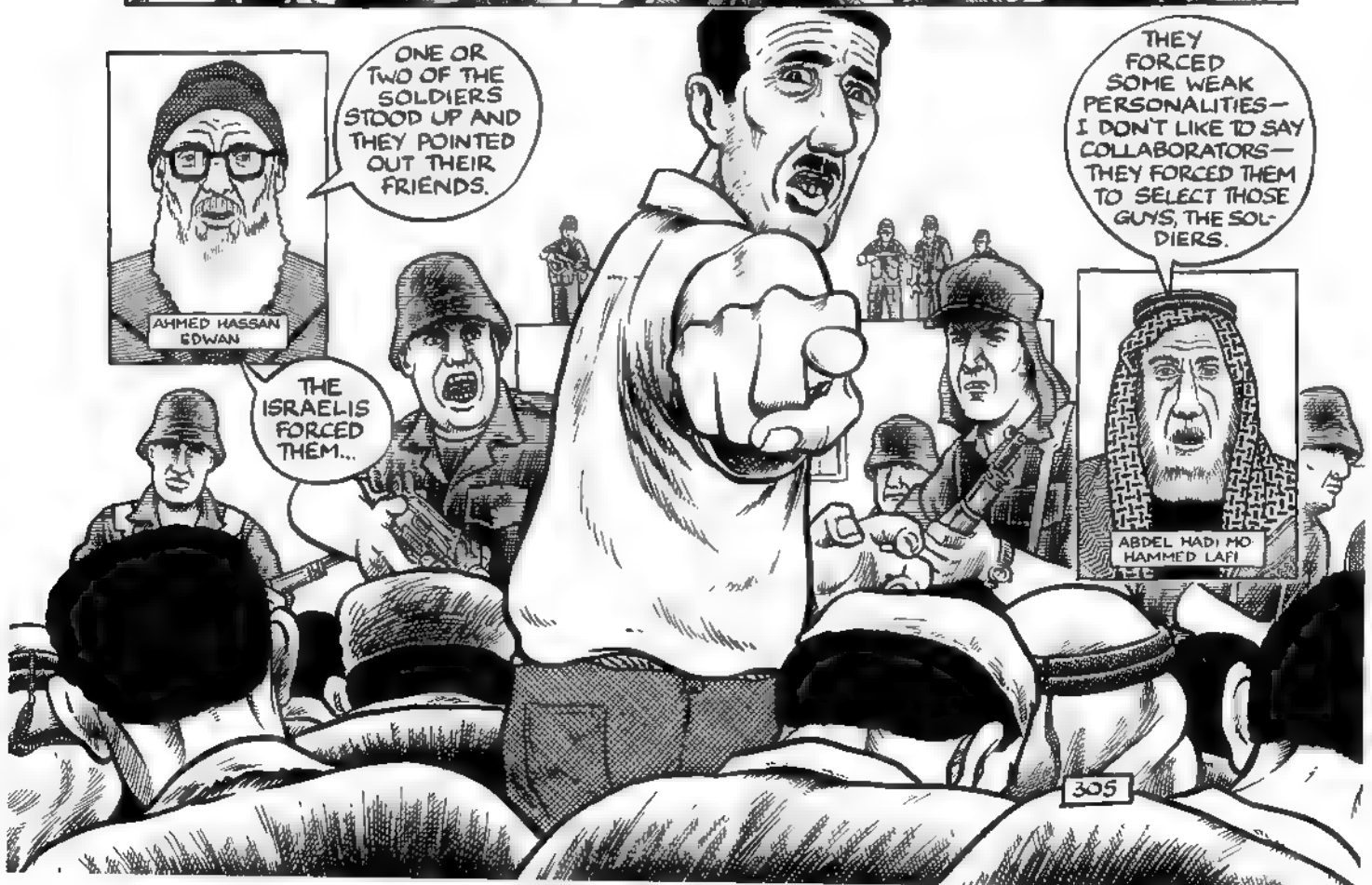
The Israelis also asked Palestinian soldiers to surrender voluntarily.

THEY CALLED FOR THE SOLDIERS TO COME FORWARD THROUGH THE LOUD-SPEAKER.



'HE WHO IS A SOLDIER, COME HERE AND WE WILL NOT HARM YOU'





THEY
SELECTED
TWO COLLABORATORS...WHO THEY
KNEW WERE SOLDIERS AND ASKED
THEM TO POINT
TO THEIR COL-
LEAGUES.



SO EVERY
SOLDIER WHO
KNEW HE WOULD
BE SELECTED
TRIED TO HIDE
HIS FACE.



...AND
THE ONES
WHO [TRIED]
TO HIDE THEM-
SELVES THEY
TOOK.

AT THE
END, WHEN
SOME SOLDIERS
REFUSED TO SHOW
THEMSELVES, THE
ISRAELIS DECIDED
TO COME AND
SELECT
PEOPLE.



YOU,
STAND
UP!

YOU,
STAND
UP!

YOU,
STAND
UP!

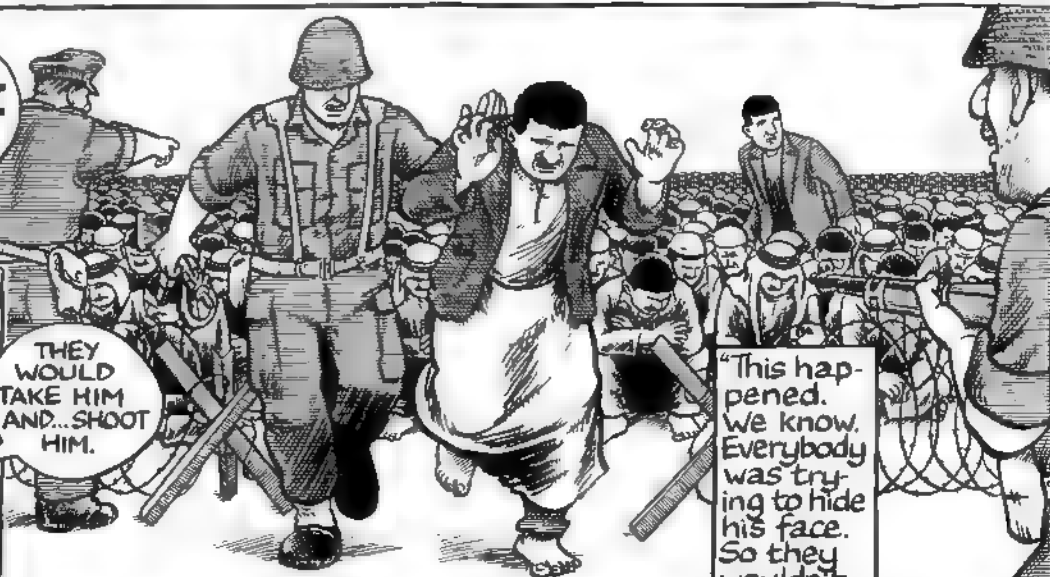


"They se-
lected
people who
were not
soldiers."

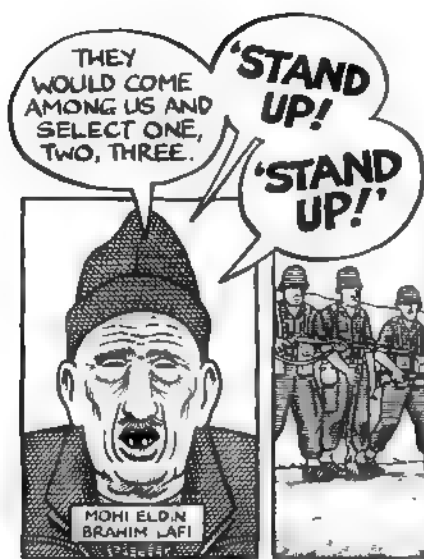
'HEY,
YOU, COME
HERE!'



THEY
WOULD
TAKE HIM
AND...SHOOT
HIM.



"This hap-
pened.
We know.
Everybody
was try-
ing to hide
his face.
So they
wouldn't
shoot him."

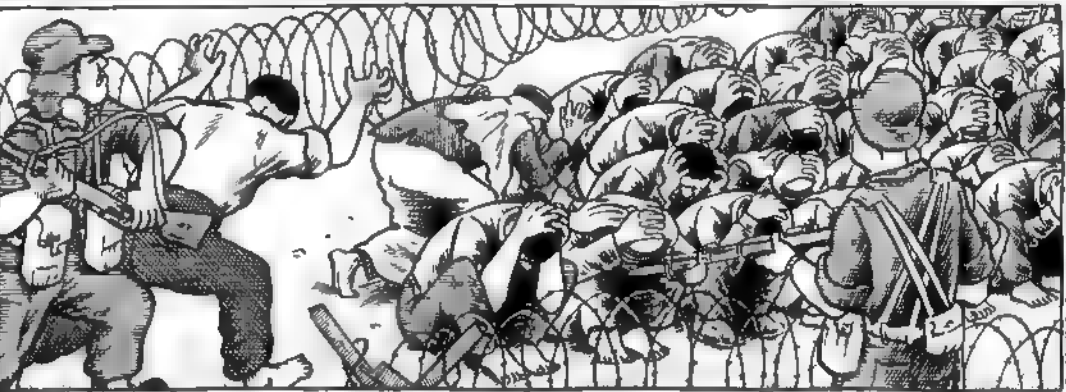


"They took them behind a wall. The western wall."



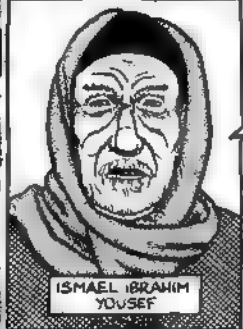
Despite these allegations and others to follow, we find no credible eyewitness account of any shootings in the schoolyard itself

The Israelis were gathering the Palestinian soldiers and other suspects netted in the screening in a separate holding area.



THE CAFE OWNER

One often repeated story, which demonstrates just how disparate some recollections are, concerns an alleged Israeli spy who had lived in Rafah and held a grudge against a cafe owner named Ihdayhee.



SUDDENLY I HEARD A VOICE CALLING ZAKI IHDAYHEE ZAKI IHDAYHEE APPEARED AND HE NEVER RETURNED.



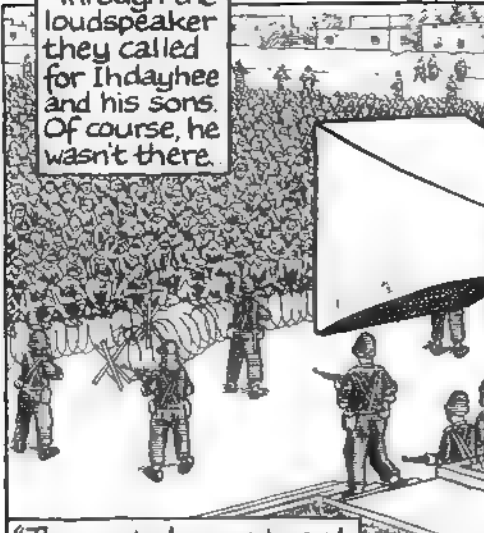
THIS SPY CALLED HIM, SELECTED HIM, AND SHOT HIM... THEY TOOK HIM AND SHOT HIM BEHIND THE BUILDING.



THEY CALLED HIS NAME FROM THE LOUDSPEAKER INSIDE THE SCHOOL. THEY TOOK HIM BEHIND THE BUILDING, AND WE HEARD SHOOTING.



MOHAMMED ZIDAN: "Through the loudspeaker they called for Ihdayhee and his sons. Of course, he wasn't there."



"The next day we heard that Ihdayhee had been killed inside his house or in the streets."



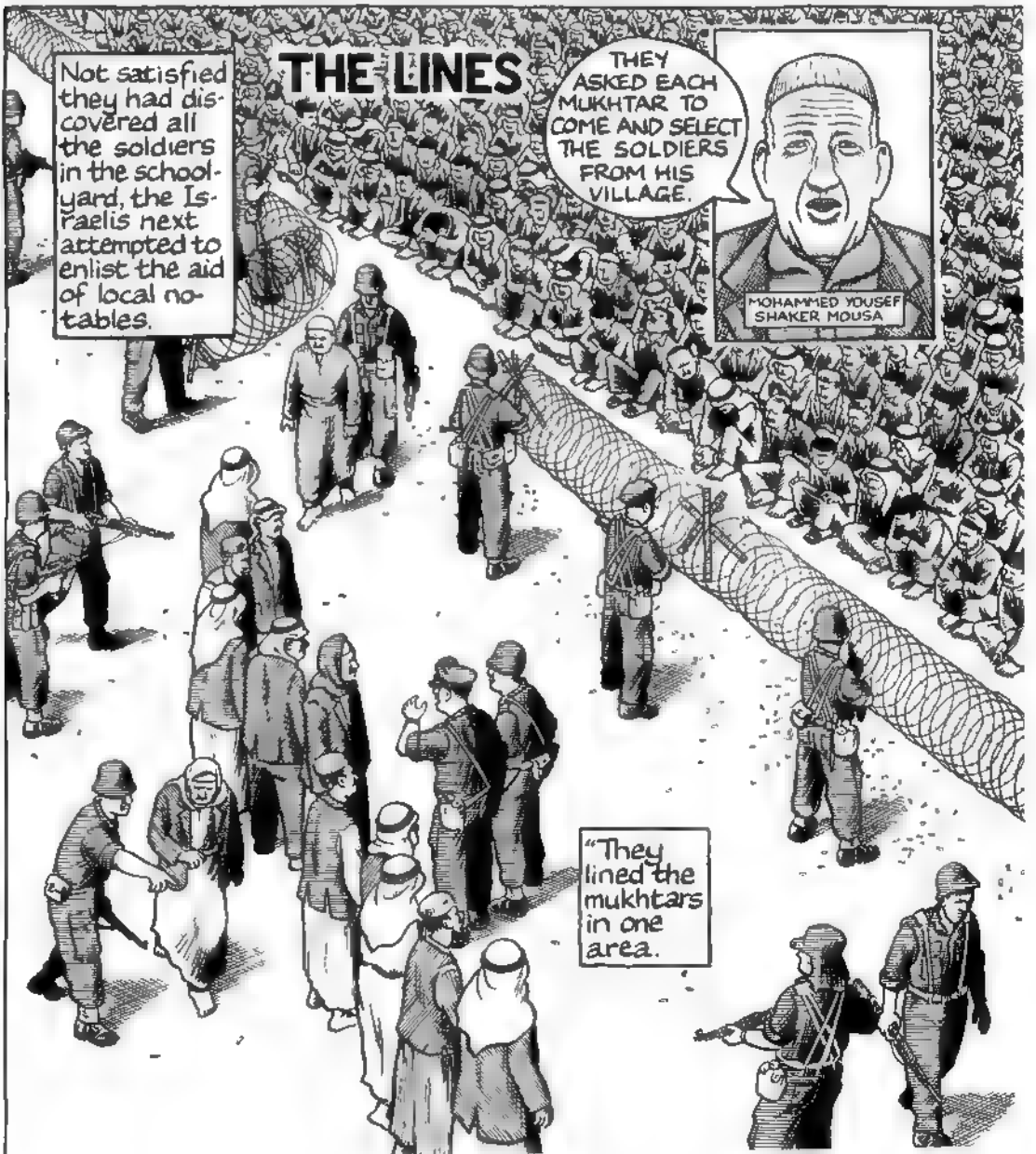
[IHDAYHEE WAS] KILLED IN THE STREET... I SAW THE BLOOD RUNNING FROM HIS BODY.



Not satisfied they had discovered all the soldiers in the schoolyard, the Israelis next attempted to enlist the aid of local notables.

THE LINES

THEY ASKED EACH MUKHTAR TO COME AND SELECT THE SOLDIERS FROM HIS VILLAGE.



"They lined the mukhtars in one area."

"Most of the mukhtars didn't go up. And some...went just to save the lives of the people."



"Maybe the mukhtars said,

ANYONE WHO IS A SOLDIER, COME HERE.

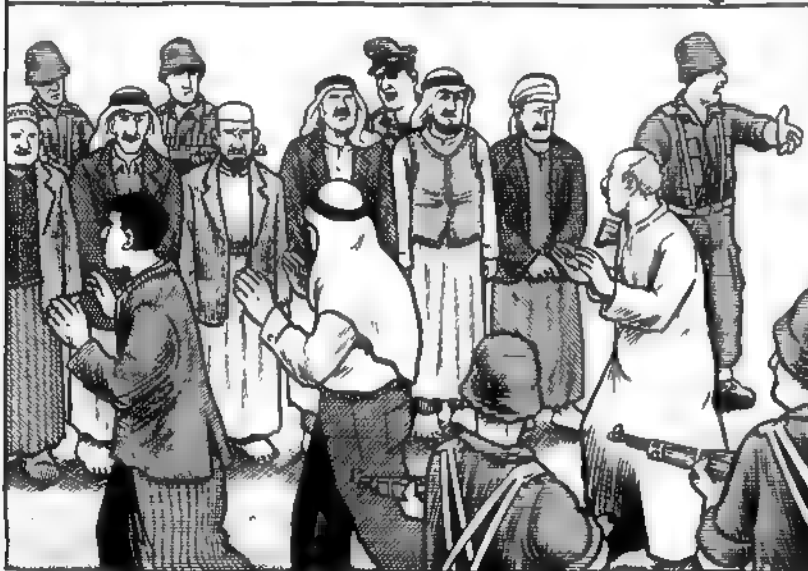
[THE IS-RAELIS] ASKED THE PEOPLE TO STAND IN ONE LINE AND WALK IN FRONT OF THE MUKHTARS



ANONYMOUS 1

"They didn't insist, and they didn't mention anyone by name."

"The mukhtars looked at us and never selected anyone..."



"When I finished my turn and was going back, the soldier who guarded the selected area told me,

YOU! COME HERE!



"All the mukhtars ...shouted,

THIS IS THE PHOTOGRAPHER WHO MAKES THE IDENTITY CARDS FOR THE PEOPLE!



"So I went back to my place."

Awadallah Ahmed Awadallah, one of the mukhtars who had come forward, drives home the point. "We didn't identify anyone," he tells us



"You have to understand this."





IT WAS ONLY TEN DAYS SINCE I'D LEFT THE ARMY... I HAD A CIVILIAN [IDENTITY] CARD



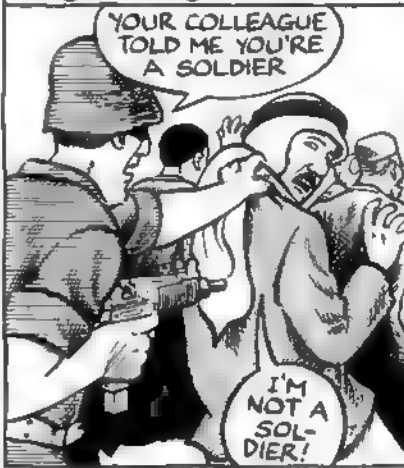
"There was a colleague of mine whose personality was very very weak, and when they took him in the morning he gave all the information and all the names, and he stood... with them at the tables.



"When I came and showed them my identity card, they let me go.



"After five minutes...a soldier caught me by the collar..."



YOUR FRIEND TOLD ME. YOU'RE A DRIVER FOR A MAJOR!



THE SPEED UP

At some point the Israelis must have realized they might not finish screening all the men before sun-down.



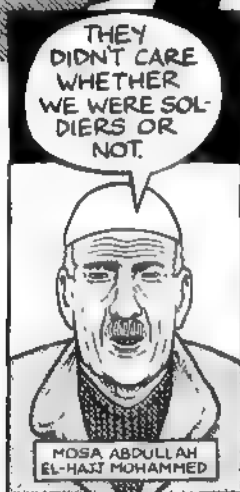
WHEN IT WAS ABOUT 4 O'CLOCK THEY STARTED TO MAKE THE PEOPLE STAND UP 30 AT A TIME.





MOHAMMED ZIDAN
"The people were many and the investigation rooms were few. It was near sunset and they started to hurry up the process..."

"There was no time. They would take ten people at a time, but there was no time."



THEY DIDN'T CARE WHETHER WE WERE SOLDIERS OR NOT.

MUSA ABDULLAH EL-HAJI MOHAMMED



THEY SELECTED THE HANDSOME GUYS, THE WELL-BUILT GUYS.

"We reached the desks and they selected us with their eyes"



THEY DIDN'T ASK YOU ANY QUESTIONS?

NO, THEY DIDN'T.

THEY JUST SAW US AND SELECTED US.



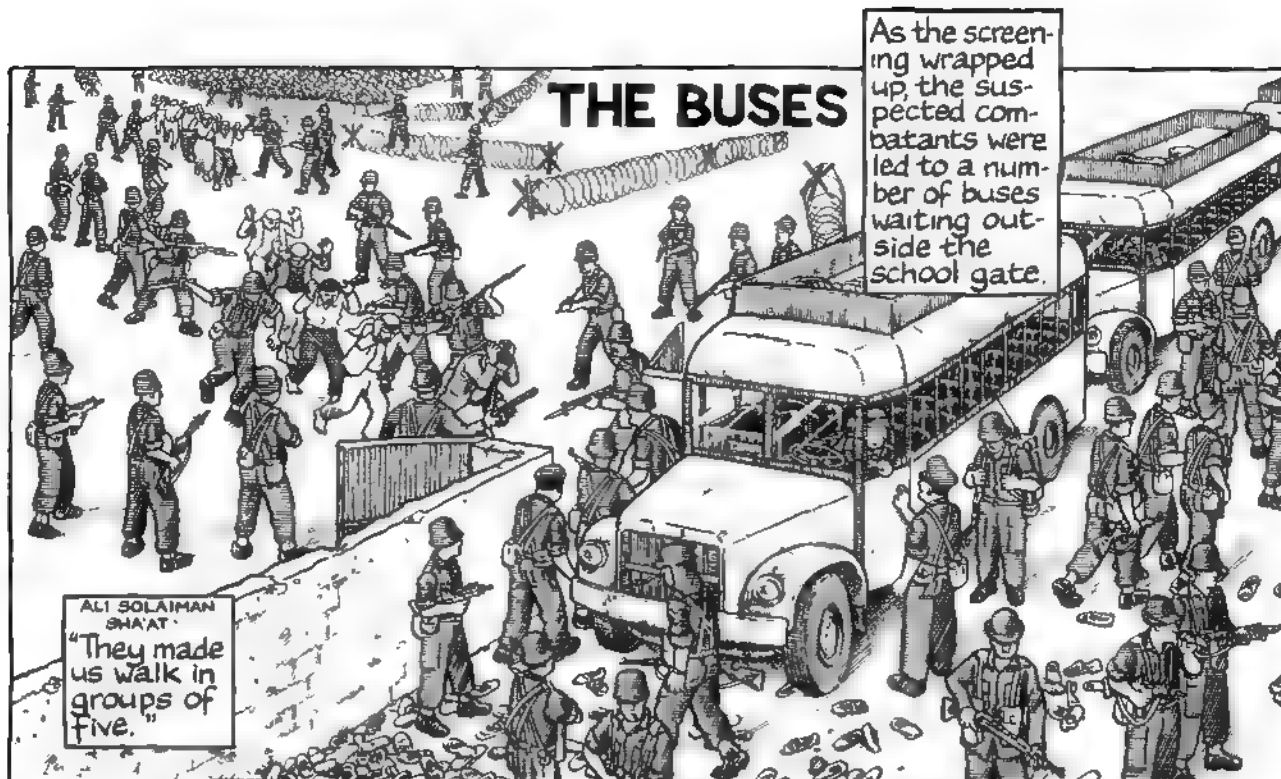
YOU GO THERE! YOU GO THERE!

SIT THERE!



MOHAMMED ZIDAN
"My turn hadn't come up."

"I was just sitting, watching."





MOSA ABDULLAH
EL-HATTJ MOHAMMED

ONE OF
THE SOLDIERS
— THROUGH
THE WINDOW —
HIT ME ON MY
LEFT SIDE

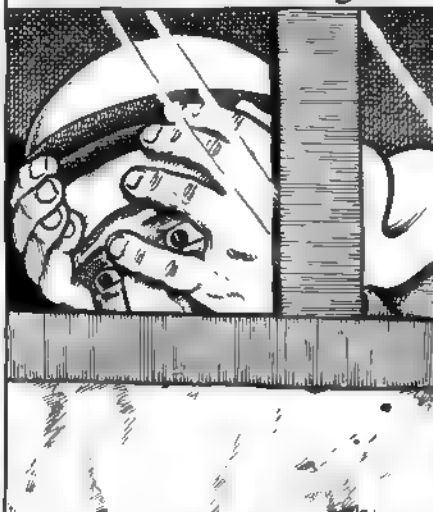


THERE
WAS ONE
WHO REFUSED
TO ENTER THE
BUS. THE SOLDIER
ASKED HIM TO
WALK, AND HE
DIDN'T WANT TO
WALK.



ABDULLAH HASSAN
KHADER EL-MOGHAYER

"When I entered the bus, I
heard a shot. I raised my head.



"I saw him dead, [being] pulled and hid-
den behind the cactus trees."



The suspects taken from the government school and the other gathering points were briefly incarcerated in Gaza City and elsewhere and then transferred to Atlit prison in northern Israel.

There, with thousands of other prisoners of war they awaited repatriation.

THE RELEASE

NOW IT'S ABOUT SUNSET...

WE HEARD THE WOMEN SHOUTING FROM OUTSIDE.

ALL THE WOMEN CAME TO THE SCHOOL AT THAT MOMENT.

[WE] HEARD THE WOMEN OUTSIDE SCREAMING AND SHOUTING

OH, THEY'VE KILLED THE PEOPLE!

THEY'VE KILLED THE PEOPLE!

AWAD MOHAMMED AHMED

ZAKI HASSAN EDWAN

THERE WAS ONLY ONE HOUSE BETWEEN US AND THE SCHOOL. WE'D HEARD EVERYTHING

"I went outside."

HOSSEIN SALAMA BADWAN

"Many many women were waiting to learn the fate of their men."



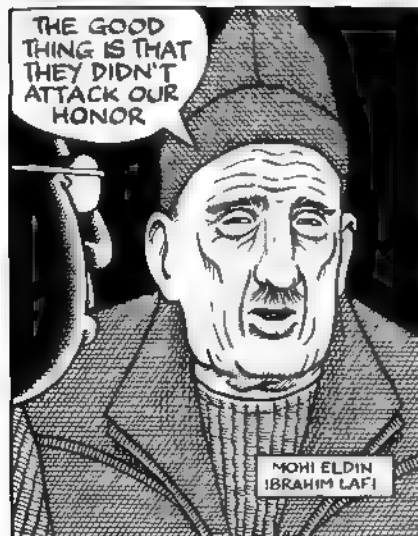
AND WE [BECAME] NOISY WHEN WE HEARD THE WOMEN SCREAMING.



"We thought they were being attacked by the Israeli soldiers.

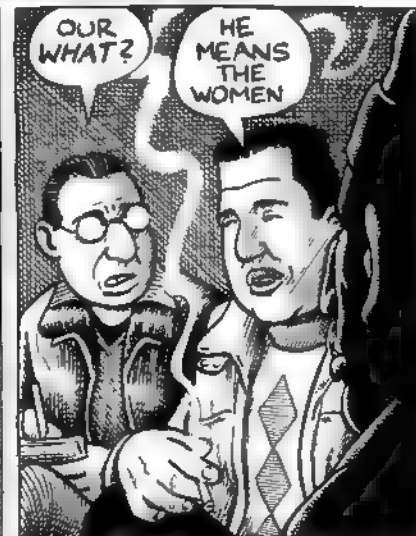


THE GOOD THING IS THAT THEY DIDN'T ATTACK OUR HONOR



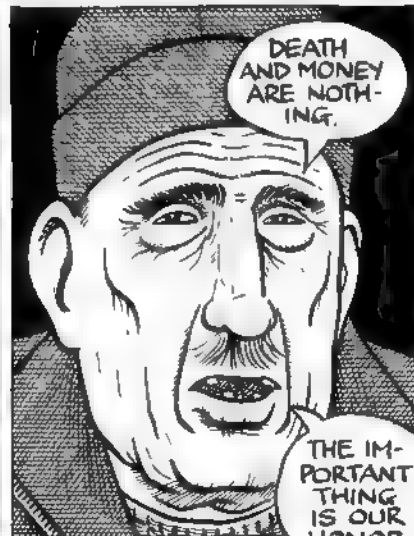
OUR WHAT?

HE MEANS THE WOMEN



DEATH AND MONEY ARE NOTHING.

THE IMPORTANT THING IS OUR HONOR.



THEN A JEEP CAME.
INSIDE IT, FOUR
SOLDIERS,
FOUR TALL
SOLDIERS.



NOW...
GO TO
YOUR
HOUSES.

BUT
QUIETLY.

DON'T
TRY ANY-
THING BE-
CAUSE THE SOL-
DIERS MIGHT
SHOOT
YOU!



A HIGH
OFFICER,
CAME AND
STOOD IN
FRONT OF
US.



AT FIVE
ALL OF YOU
SHOULD GO
TO YOUR
HOUSES!



TWO
HOURS OR
AN HOUR
AND A HALF
AFTER SUN-
SET-



GO
HOME!

YOU
CAN GO
HOME!



MOHAMMED ZIDAN
"Through the
loudspeaker
they said,

NOW
YOU WILL
GO TO YOUR
HOUSES.

WITHIN
THREE OR
FIVE MINUTES
WE WANT [NO
ONE] IN THE
SCHOOL.

ANY-
ONE WE
FIND WE'LL
SHOOT!



"With his hand [an officer] gave us a sign to go.



"Immediately after, the firing started from all sides.



"From the roof.

"from the soldiers inside the rooms.



"from the soldiers in the schoolyard."

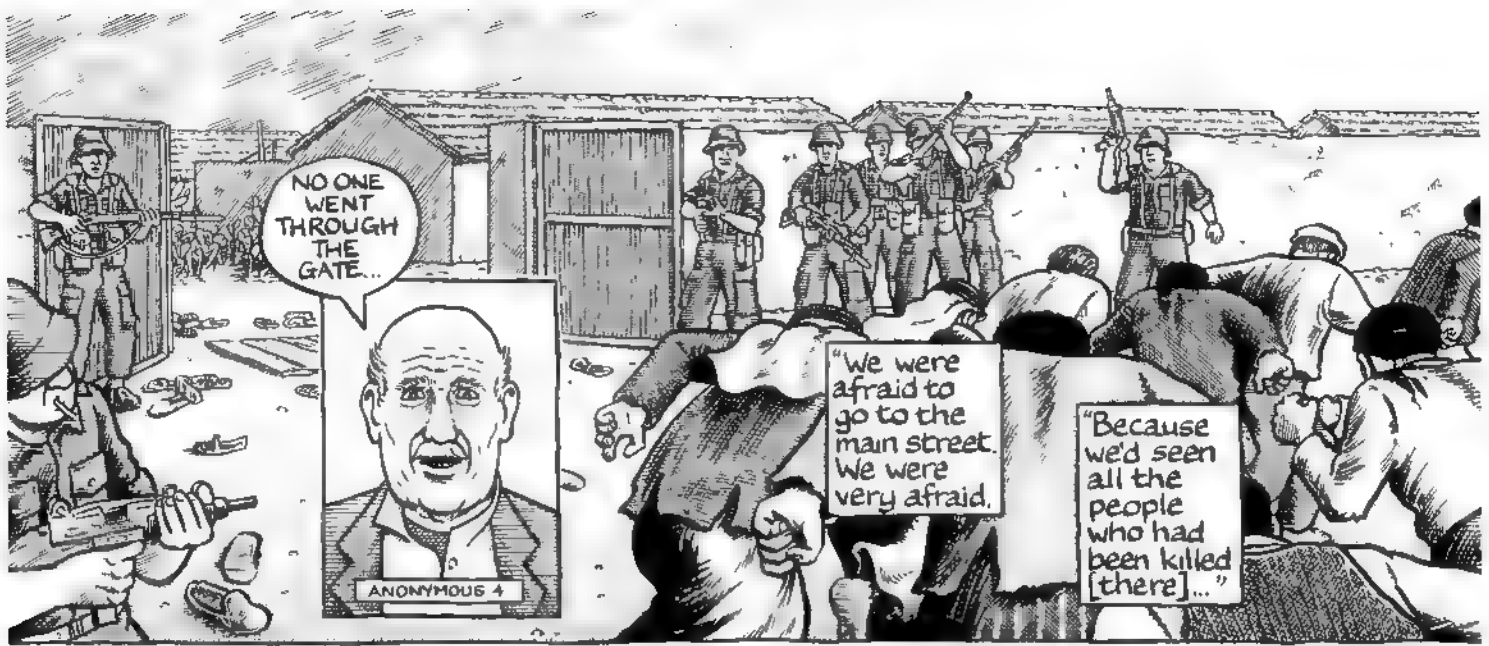


THEY RELEASED US AND BEGAN SHOOTING HEAVILY FROM THE SCHOOL-



TOOT TOOT TOOT!







MOHAMMED ZIDAN
"At the west
ern end
[behind] the
school there
wasn't a wall,
there was a
wire [fence]."

"The first
people who
reached the
fence broke
it down in
seconds."



THERE
WAS A
WALL ON
THE NORTH
SIDE..



"ALL
THE PEOPLE
STARTED TO
JUMP OVER
THE WALL."



"Some people
fell down
and were in-
jured."

"It was
a dis-
aster."

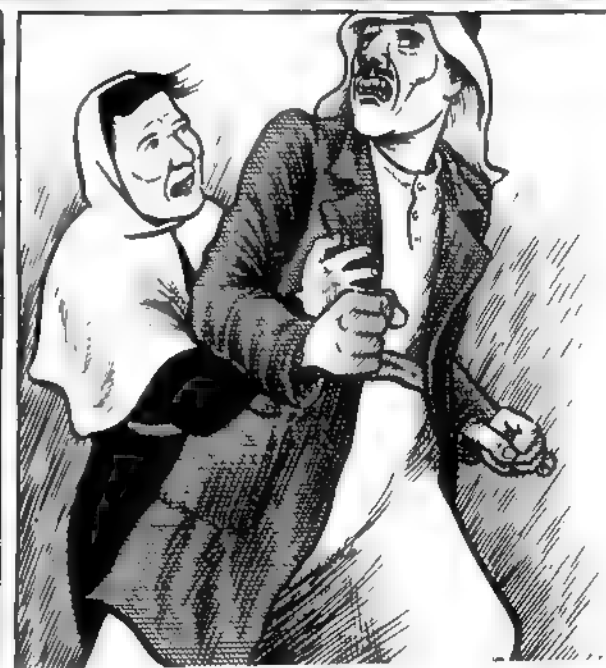
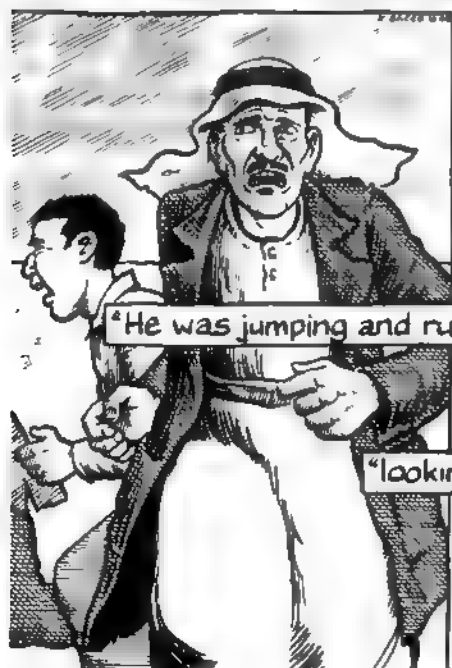


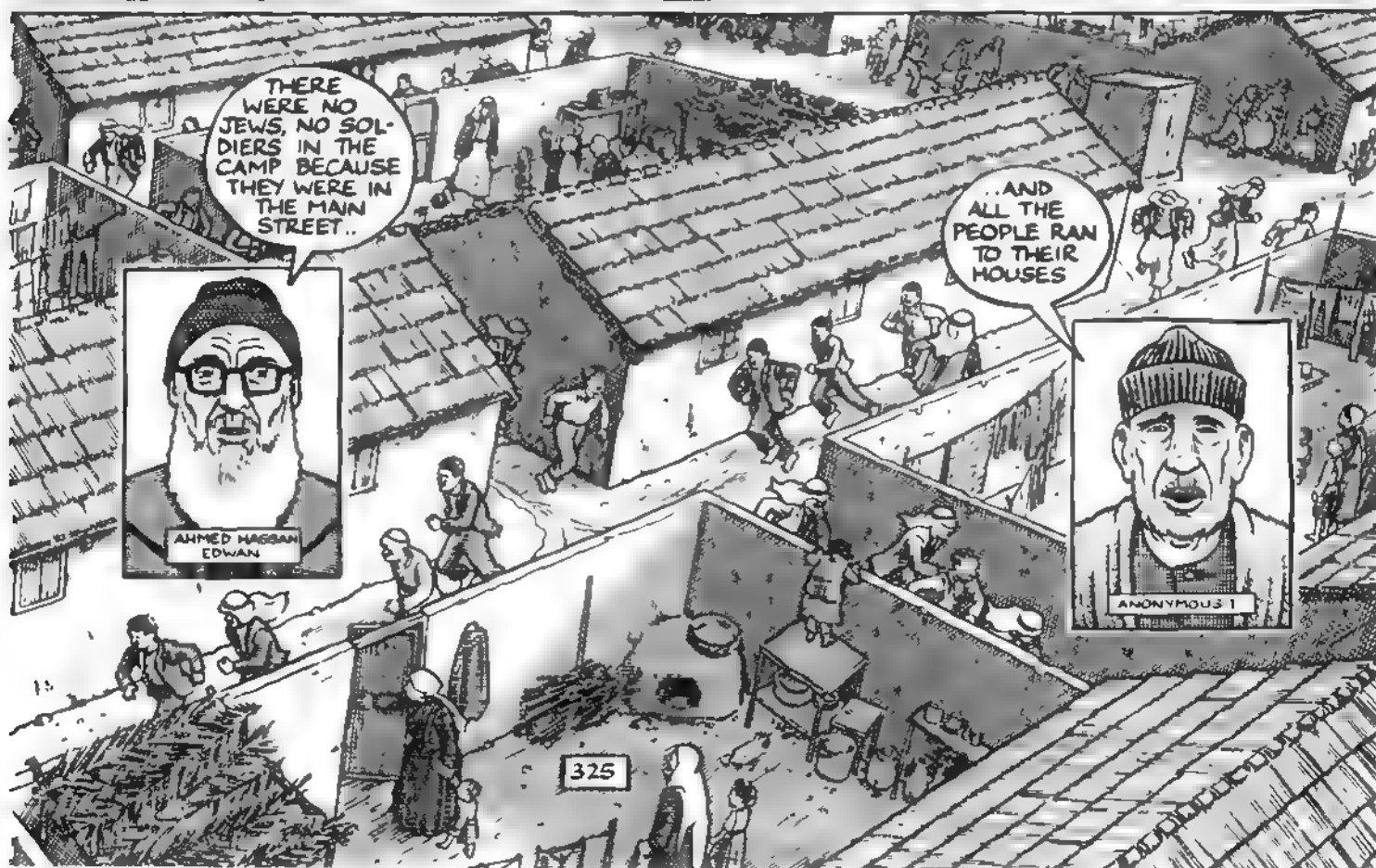


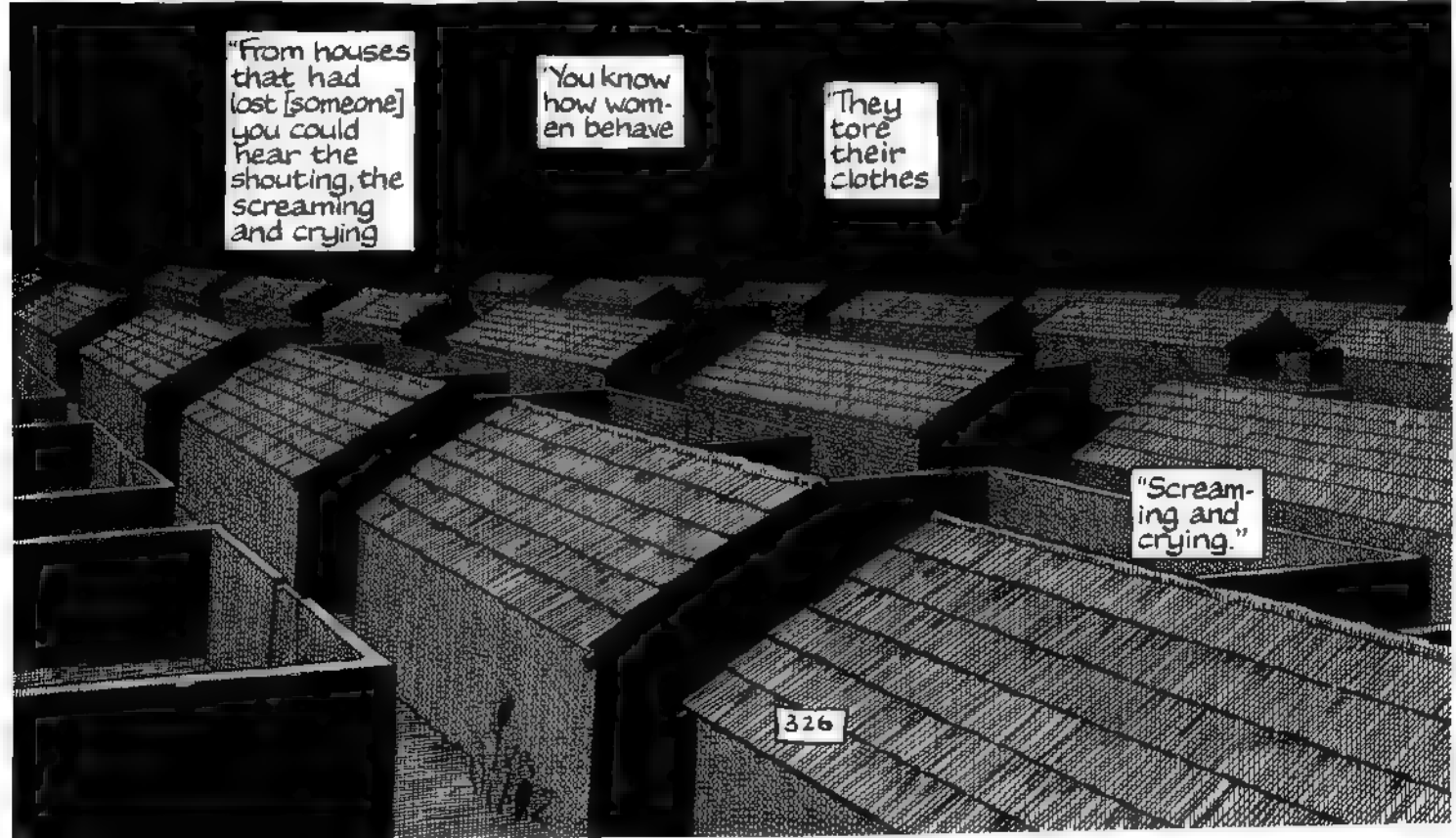
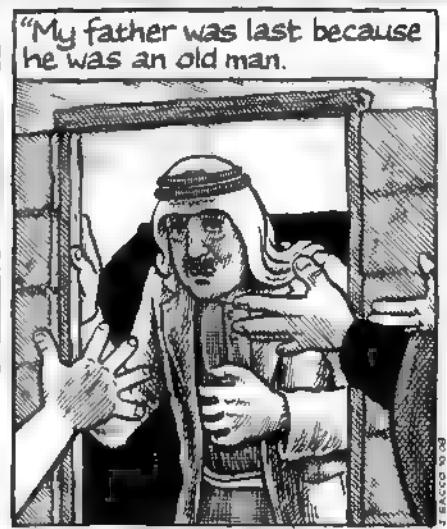
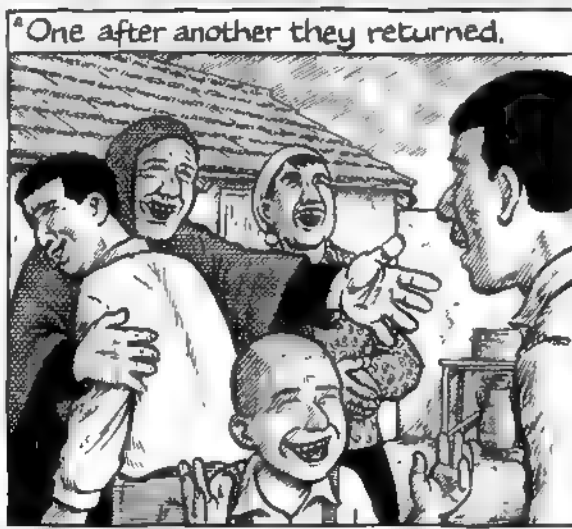
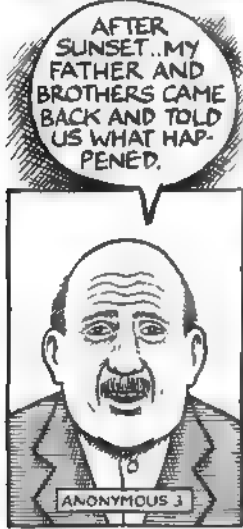
ALL OF
US PUT OUR
HANDS [ON IT]
AND PUSHED THE
WALL AND
KNOCKED IT
DOWN



THE
WALL
DISAP-
PEARED.







THE MOUTH OF THE LION

PT.2

Perhaps you are thinking the curtain has come down on the story about the Israeli screening operation in Rafah on November 12, 1950.

After all, the surviving men have either escaped the school and are back at home or are on buses headed into confinement.

But what of that third group, the dead?

To find out their story we need to locate their relatives

Ashraf takes charge!

Waving the list from Owda Ayesh's book, He marches into a general store and accosts the first person he sees

DO YOU KNOW ANY OF THESE FAMILIES?

ANY OF THEM LIVE AROUND HERE?

NO. I DON'T KNOW ANY OF THEM.

WHY DO YOU WANT TO KNOW?

YOU DON'T KNOW ANY OF THEM BUT YOU WANT TO KNOW WHY?

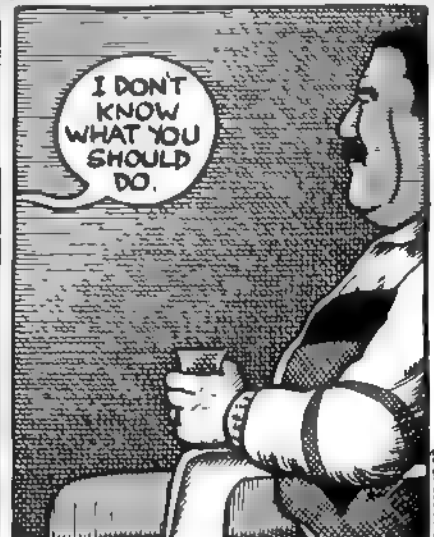
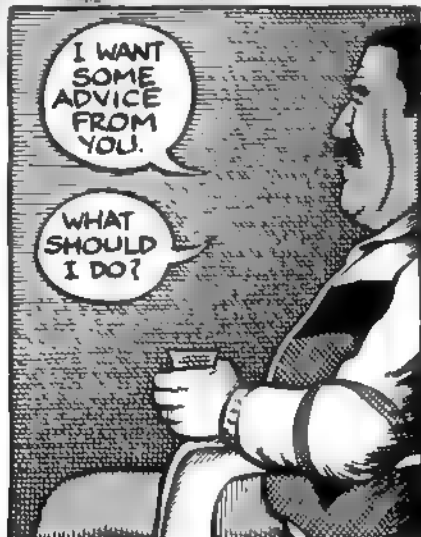
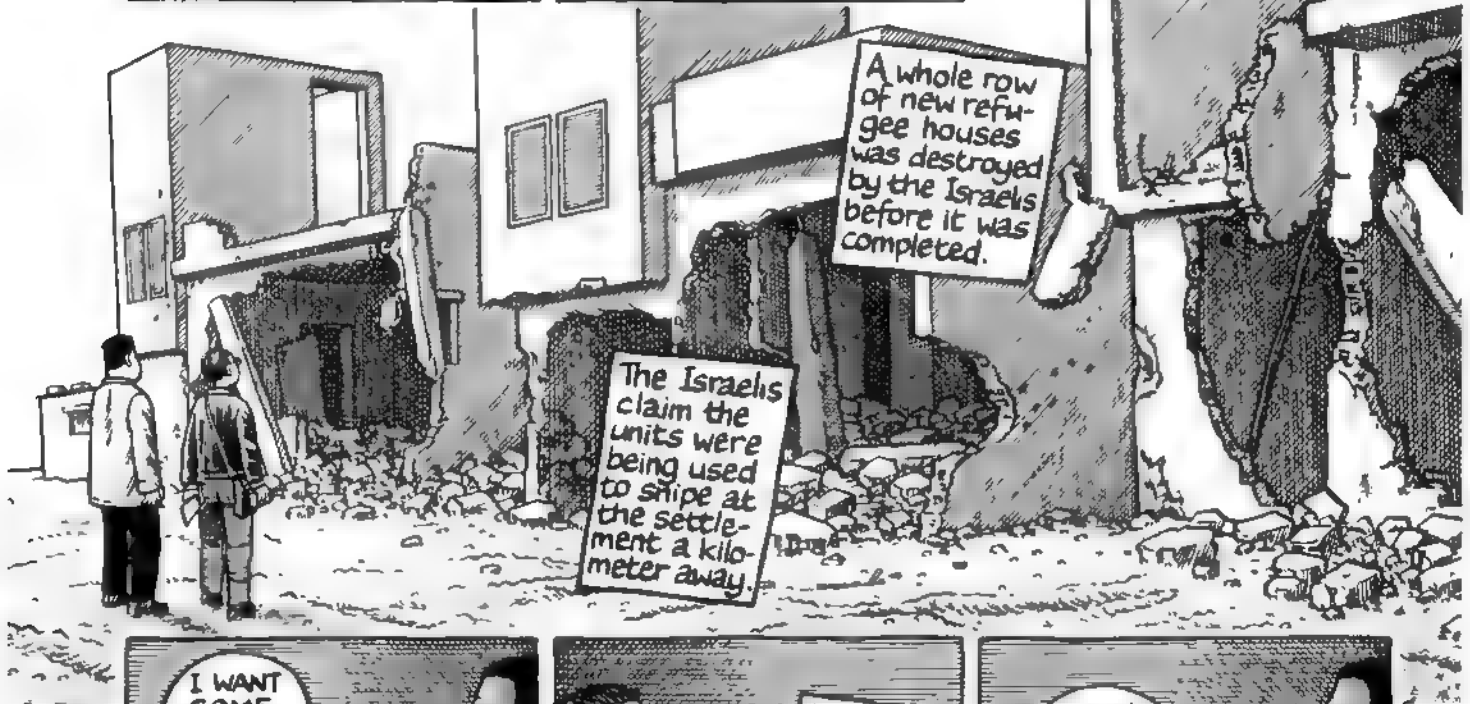
ENOUGH!





Replacement homes are being built in the Tal El-Sultan neighborhood facing the Jewish settlement bloc.

Many are already pockmarked by Israeli gunfire.



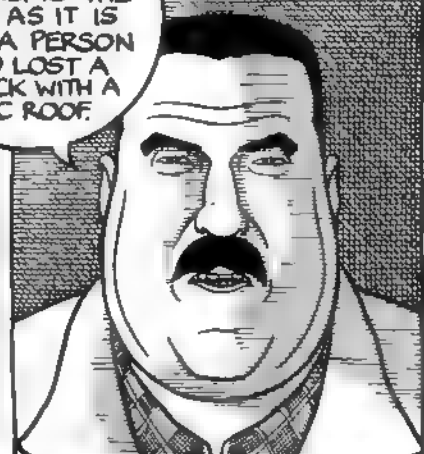
MY FATHER HAS NO WORK AND MY BROTHER WANTS TO MARRY.



WE PUT EVERYTHING INTO OUR HOUSE, DO YOU UNDERSTAND?



THE COMPENSATION WE'LL RECEIVE FOR THE HOUSE WE BUILT IS THE SAME AS IT IS FOR A PERSON WHO LOST A SHACK WITH A ZINC ROOF.



THOSE WHO LOST THEIR HOMES EARLY ON GOT FUNDS FROM ALL SORTS OF BENEVOLENT ORGANIZATIONS AND \$5,000 FROM SADDAM HUSSEIN.

I KNOW A GUY WHO LOST HIS HOME AT THE BEGINNING OF THE INTIFADA, AND HE'S STILL SPENDING THE COMPENSATION MONEY.



Those days are over. In the name of the War on Terror, the Americans are leading a squeeze on money coming into Gaza from Islamic groups, and certainly the besieged ruler of Baghdad is in no position to dole out more funds to homeless Palestinians.

SOME PEOPLE WERE HAPPY THEY LOST THEIR HOMES.



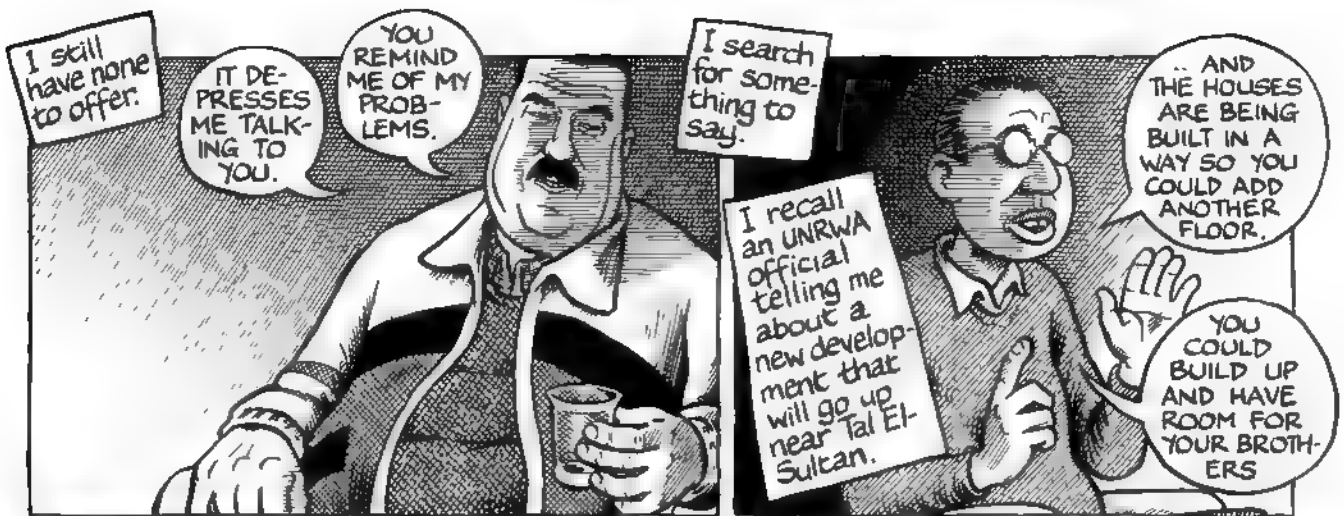
THEY LOST A BAD HOME AND THEY GOT A REPLACEMENT.

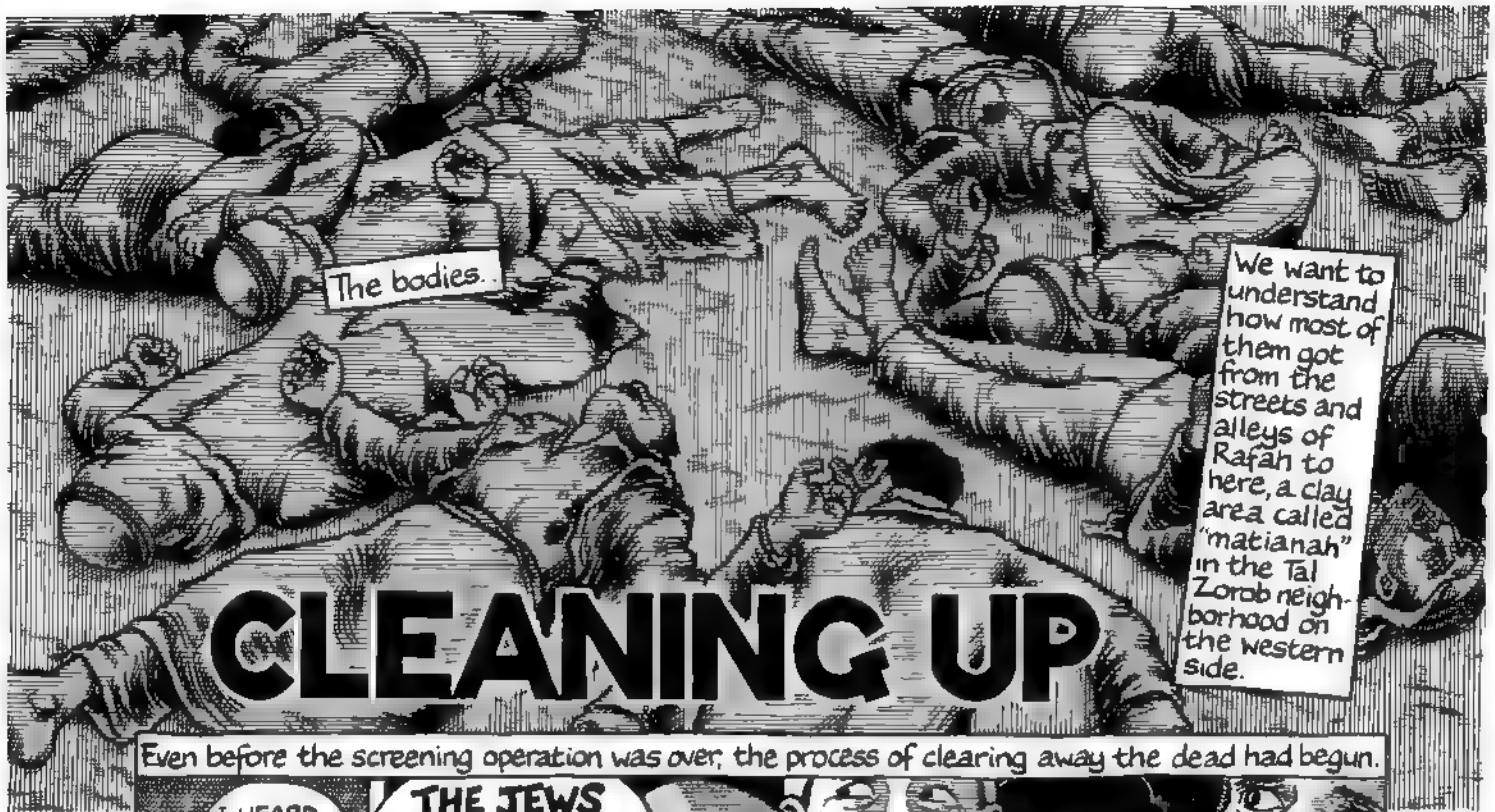


BUT WHAT ABOUT ME?



GIVE ME SOME ADVICE?





The bodies...

We want to understand how most of them got from the streets and alleys of Rafah to here, a clay area called "matianah" in the Tal Zorab neighborhood on the western side.

CLEANING UP

Even before the screening operation was over, the process of clearing away the dead had begun.



I HEARD A GIRL SCREAMING,

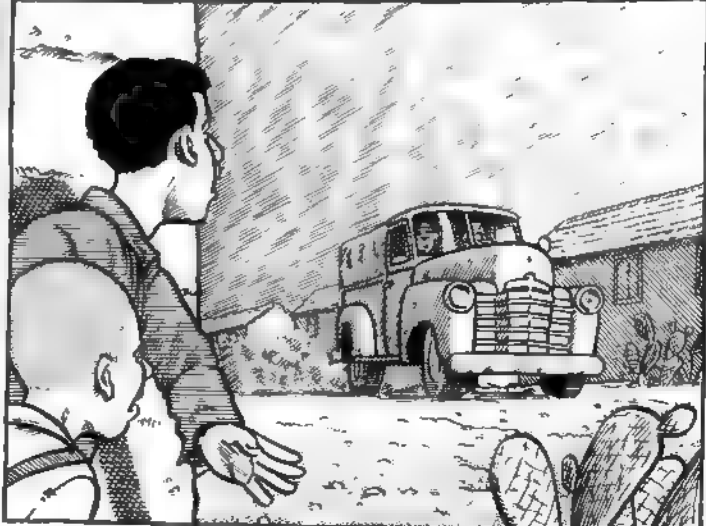
THE JEWS HAVE KILLED... OUR MEN AND BURIED THEM WEST OF RAFAH!

THEY KILLED OUR MEN!

"Repeating this over and over."

"And I went out with the children, crying... without caring about anything."

"Then I saw a blue pick-up with a green covering... a civilian truck driven by soldiers."



"I saw the bodies stacked on top of each other, and their legs hung out of the end of the truck."

"I saw only one car... Many cars had already passed."

"I turned back to my home crying and fearful. We started to hit our faces with our hands."



"We thought they'd killed all the men."

One man held at a secondary gathering point, an UNRWA school on Sea Street to the west of town, told us that as he and the others were being released—

"What I saw is—this is certified—we should be honest when we are telling the story.."

—WE SAW ONE OR TWO CARS CARRYING BODIES.



ANONYMOUS

"I saw one car actually"

"The car was moving and we were leaving the school, that's all."



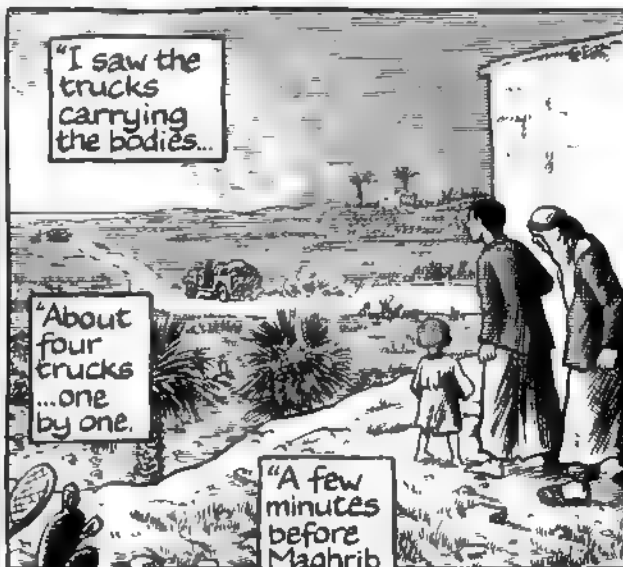
Owda Abdullah Hejazi, who had been released from the government school, arrived home in Tal Zorob where he had a clear view toward the west.

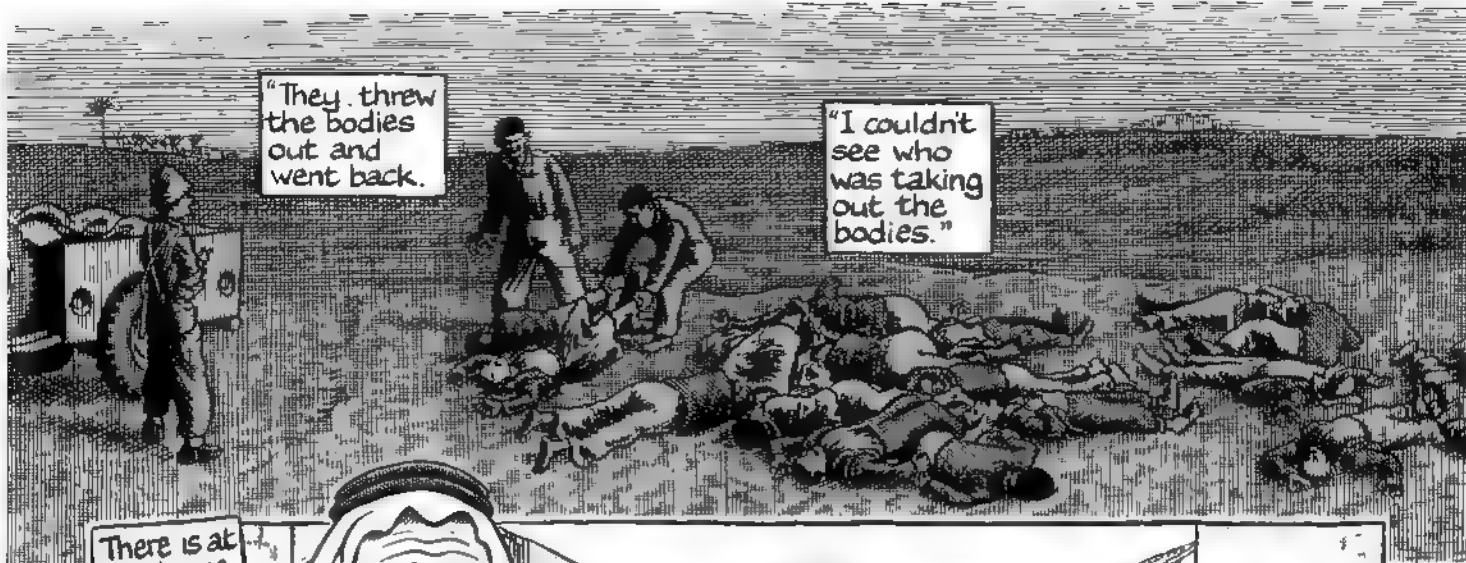
THE LAND AT THAT TIME WAS EMPTY... WITHOUT BUILDINGS, WITHOUT HOUSES.

"I saw the trucks carrying the bodies..."

"About four trucks...one by one."

"A few minutes before Maghrib [prayer]."





"They threw the bodies out and went back."

"I couldn't see who was taking out the bodies."

There is at least one man who can shed light on "who" — Mohammed Atwa El-Najeeli, left for dead near the UNRWA distribution center, bleeding from his many wounds



IN THE AFTERNOON, AFTER THE ASR [PRAYER], I HEARD THE SOUND OF A VEHICLE COMING TO GET THE BODIES.

"I saw it was full of youths... and all of them with their tongues out."

"The vehicle came with two soldiers, and two Palestinians came toward me."

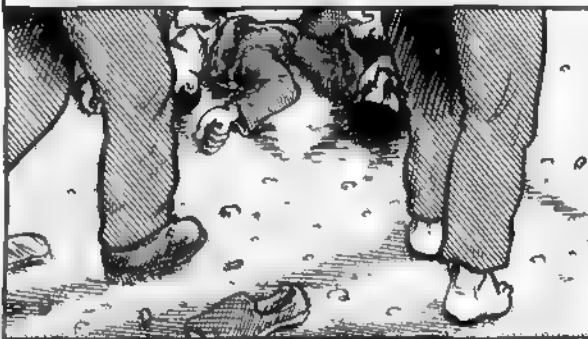


"They were dead."

"Like fish."

"Like fish."

"On top of each other."



"They took the bodies, all the bodies."

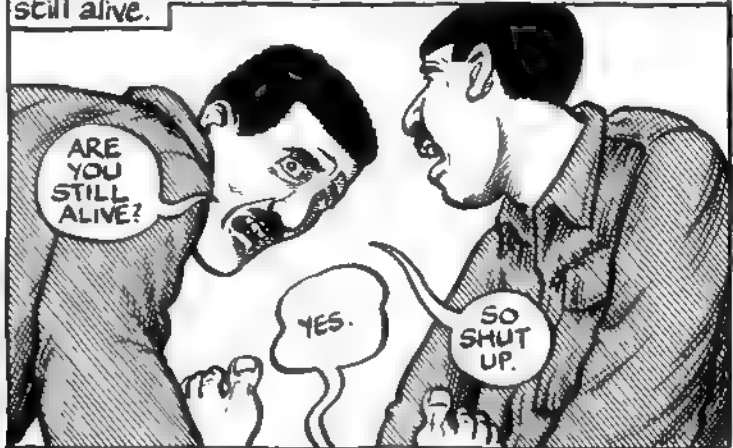


"I was the last."

"They took me by my legs.



"When I realized they were Arabs, I told them I'm still alive.



"They went. I was the only one in the street... Only me



"It became cold

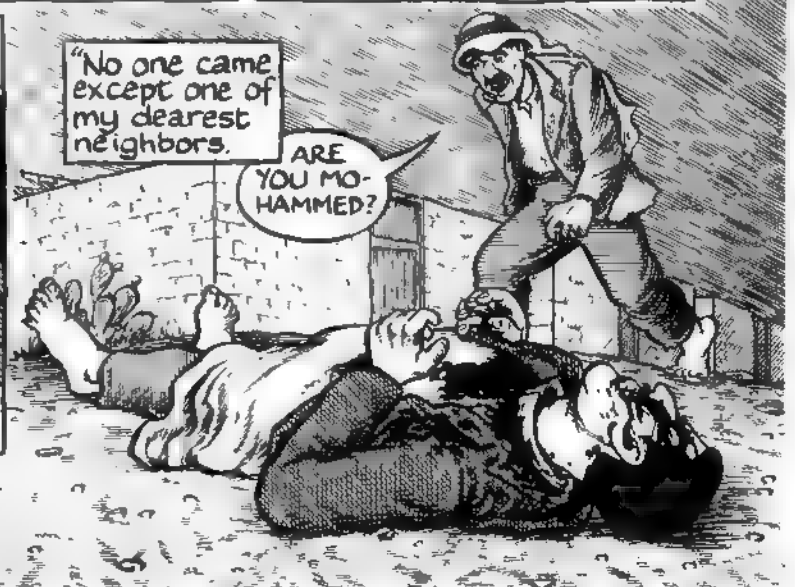
"Now the people left the school. I heard them...and heard shooting also.

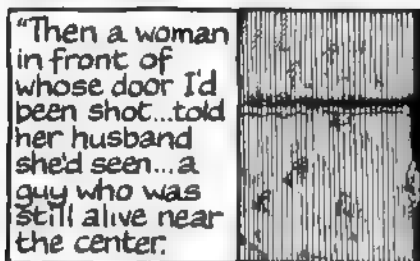
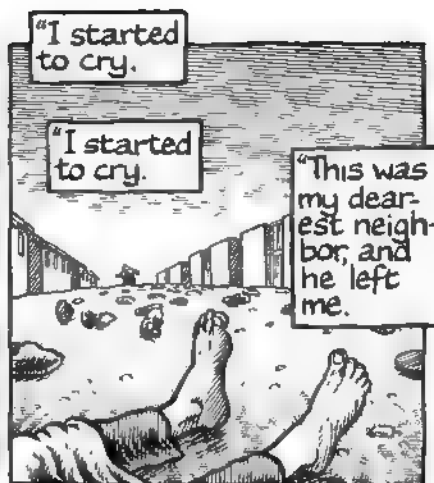
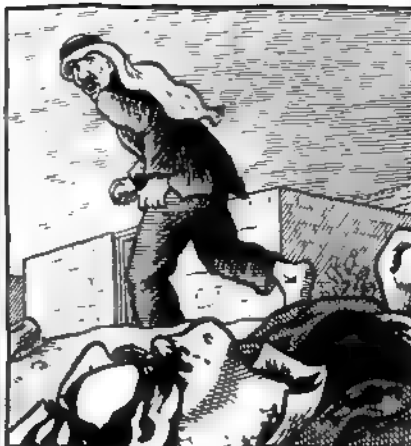


"I began to tell myself, 'Maybe someone will come and find me,'

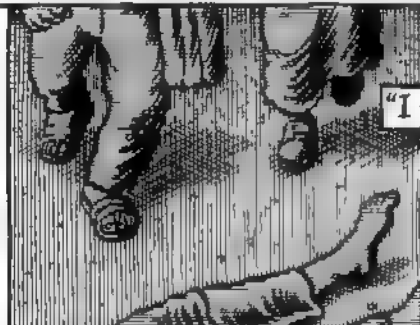
"No one came except one of my dearest neighbors.

ARE YOU MO-HAMMED?





"He came with his father and took me with a blanket..to the clinic."



"I was shouting from my pain, screaming.."

DON'T LET THE ISRAELIS HEAR US

YOU ARE INJURED, BUT WE'RE STILL ALIVE



"My clothes were like one jacket from the blood. They cut off my clothes and left me."

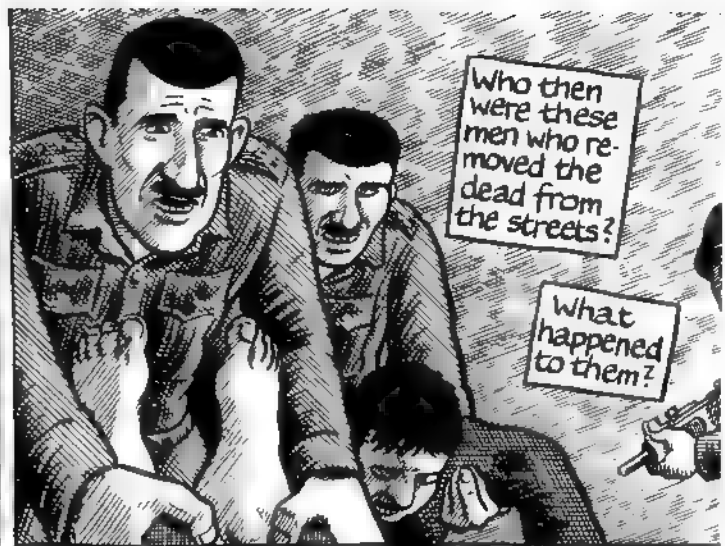


In a second discussion, when I ask Mohamed more closely about the Palestinians who were gathering the bodies, he says,



IT WAS THE POLICE-MEN WHO TOOK ME.

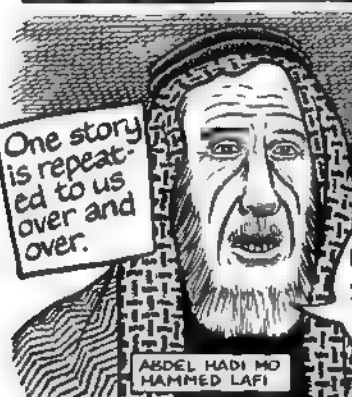
[IN] THEIR UNI-FORMS



Who then were these men who re-moved the dead from the streets?

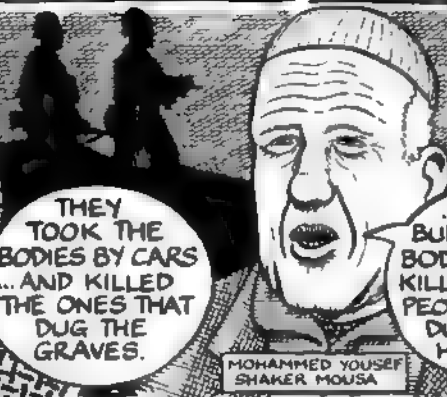
What happened to them?

One story is repeated to us over and over.



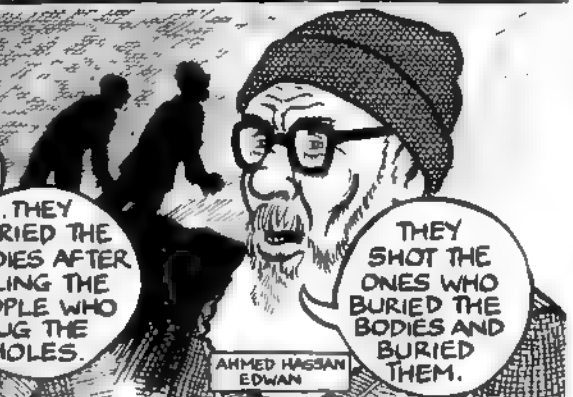
ABDEL HADI MO HAMMED LAFI

THEY TOOK THE BODIES BY CARS ... AND KILLED THE ONES THAT DUG THE GRAVES.



MOHAMMED YOUSEF SHAKER MOUSA

... THEY BURIED THE BODIES AFTER KILLING THE PEOPLE WHO DUG THE HOLES.



AHMED HASSAN EDWAN

THEY SHOT THE ONES WHO BURIED THE BODIES AND BURIED THEM.

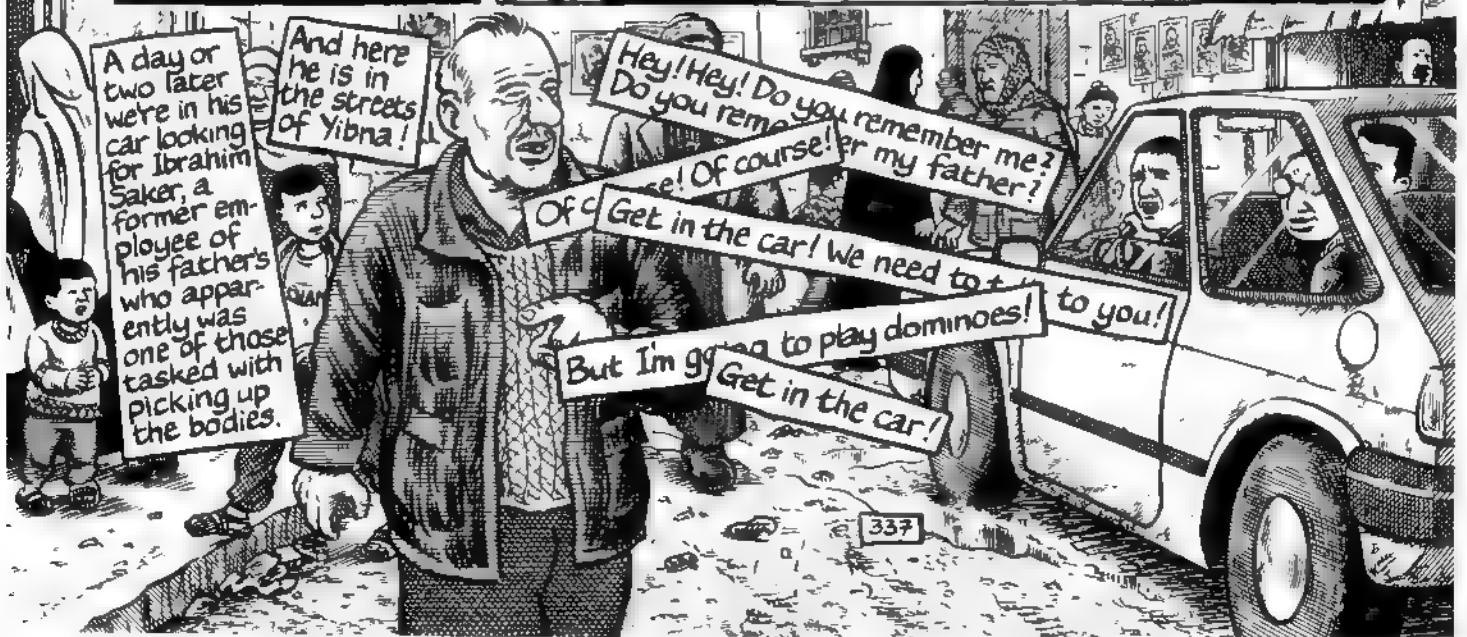
Without corroboration, Abed and I are about to file this story under "legend" until, one day, someone tells us he had heard that the Israelis forced the director of the UN sanitation center to pick some workers to collect the bodies.



The director has since died...

But after a few phone calls, we were sitting with his son, who also works at the sanitation center.

Yes yes, he knows the story. He heard it from his father.



A day or two later we're in his car looking for Ibrahim Saker, a former employee of his father's who apparently was one of those tasked with picking up the bodies.

And here he is in the streets of Yibna!

Hey! Hey! Do you remember me?

Do you remember me?

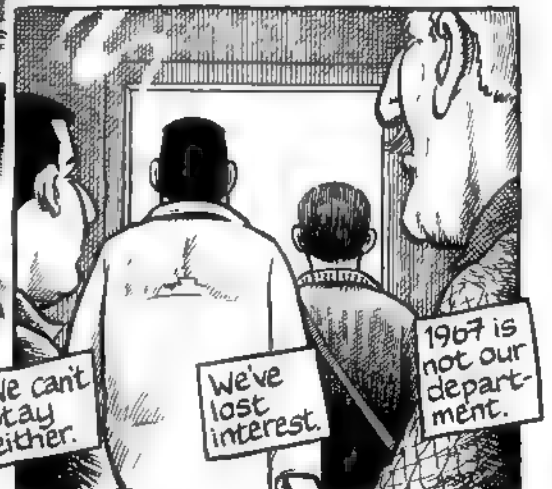
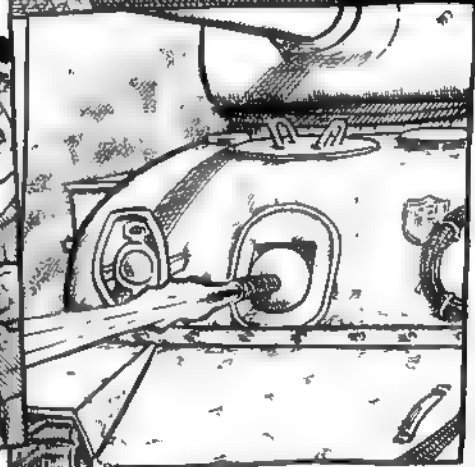
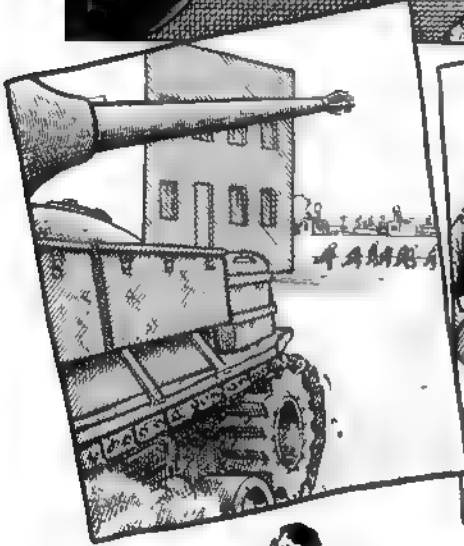
Of course! Of course! My father?

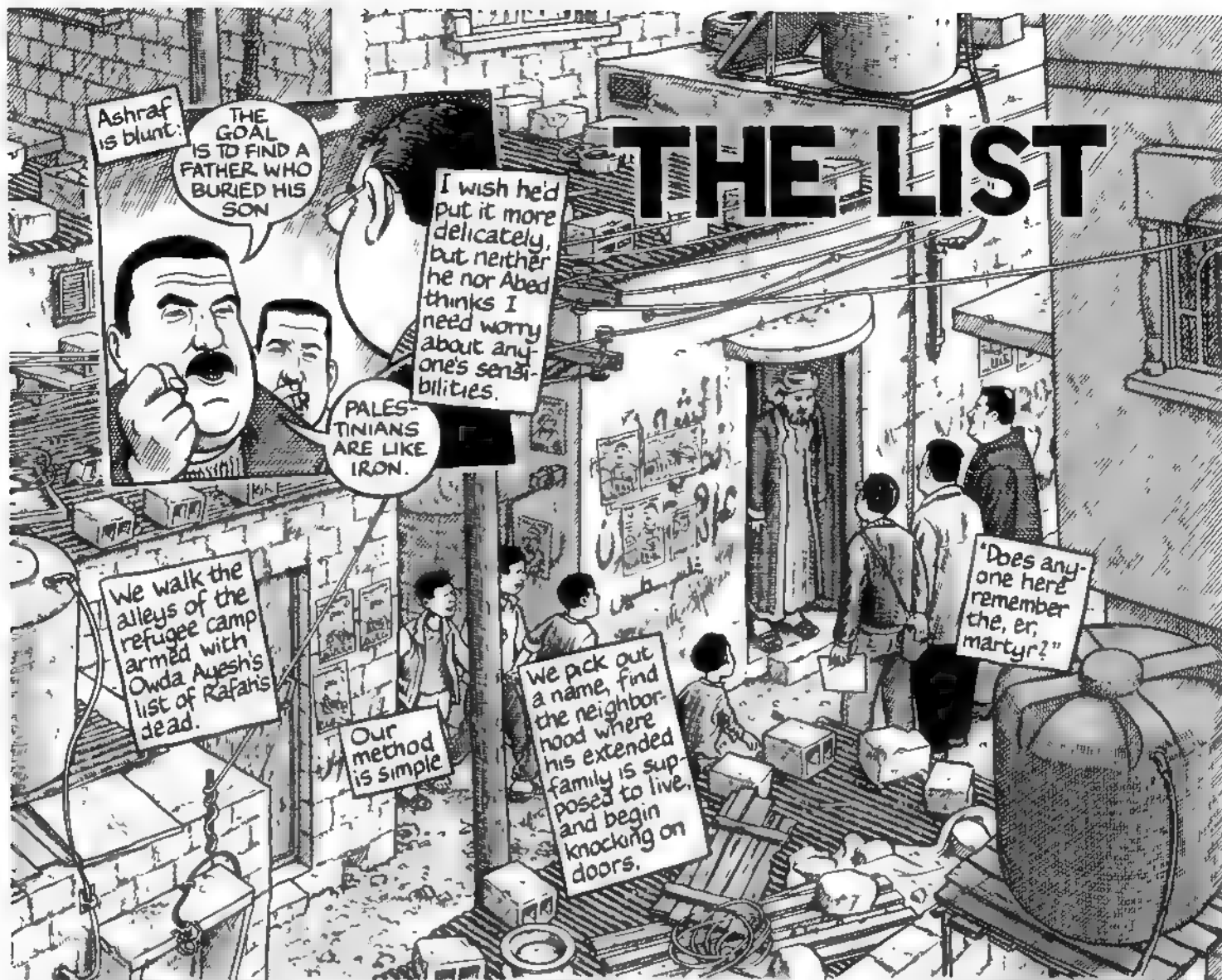
Get in the car! We need to...

to you!

But I'm going to play dominoes!

Get in the car!





Ashraf is blunt.

THE GOAL IS TO FIND A FATHER WHO BURIED HIS SON

I wish he'd put it more delicately, but neither he nor Abed thinks I need worry about any one's sensibilities.

PALESTINIANS ARE LIKE IRON.

We walk the alleys of the refugee camp armed with Owda Ayeshe's list of Rafah's dead.

Our method is simple

We pick out a name, find the neighborhood where his extended family is supposed to live, and begin knocking on doors.

'Does anyone here remember the, er, martyr?'

Our method soon hits some snags.

We sit with one very elderly man whose son was killed in '56 all right but in Khan Younis.

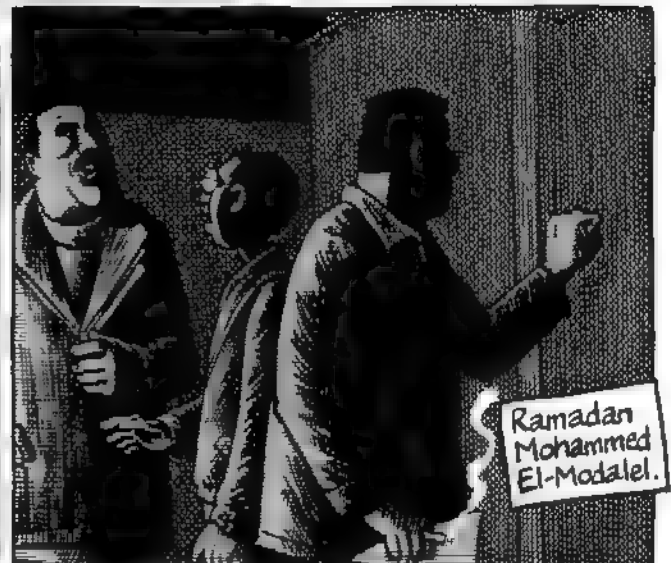
He doesn't know where his son is buried, and now he's crying.

This woman's father was taken and killed, yes, but in March '57, when the Israelis were withdrawing.

It turns out Owda Ayeshe's list contains not just the names of everyone killed on November 12, 1956, but everyone from Rafah killed during the general period, soldiers included, even if he was killed elsewhere.



Abed flicks on his lighter to remind himself of the name of the deceased.

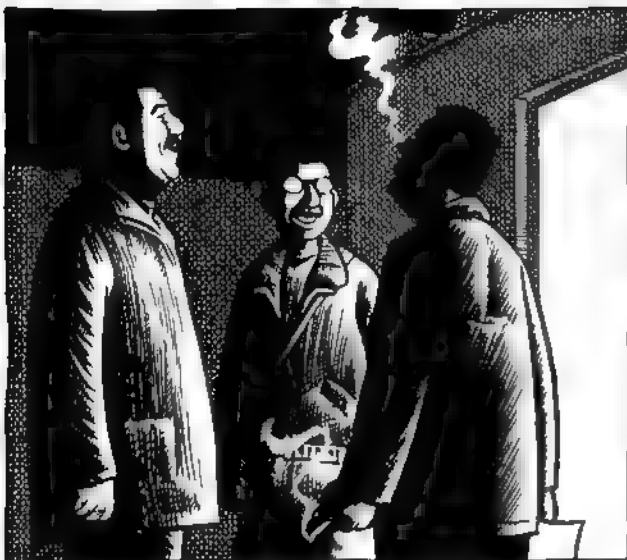


This guy has just woken up, and he doesn't know what we're talking about.



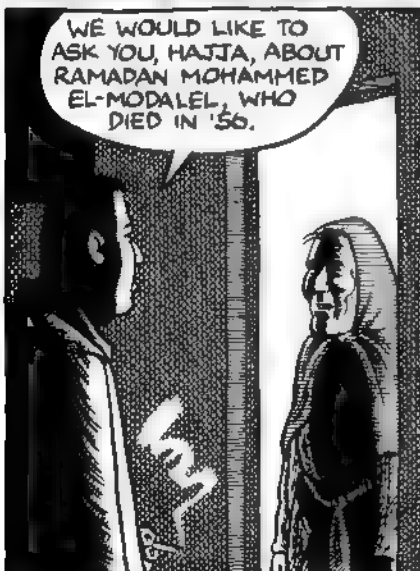
GO INSIDE AND ASK THE OLD WOMEN AND THE OLD MEN.

THEY MIGHT KNOW ABOUT HIM



The young man's grandmother appears at the door.

WE WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU, HAJJA, ABOUT RAMADAN MOHAMMED EL-MODALEL, WHO DIED IN '56.



EH?!



YOU FOUND HIM?!

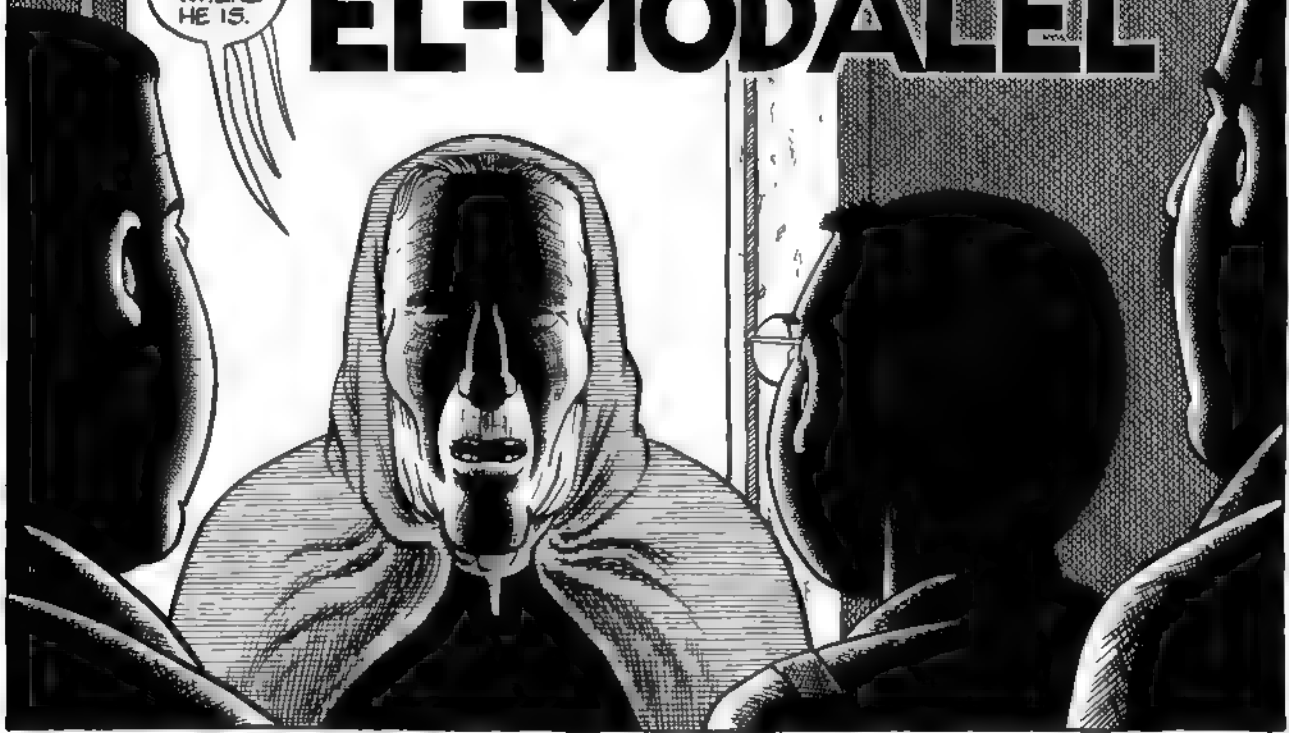


WE
ARE HIS
FAMILY.

HE'S THE
COUSIN
OF MY HUS-
BAND.

WE
DON'T
KNOW
WHERE
HE IS.

RAMADAN MOHAMMED EL-MODALEL



HE WAS IN THE ARMY, AND
HE ESCAPED TO THE SEA,
AND HE NEVER CAME
BACK. HE WAS IN
KHAN YOUNIS.

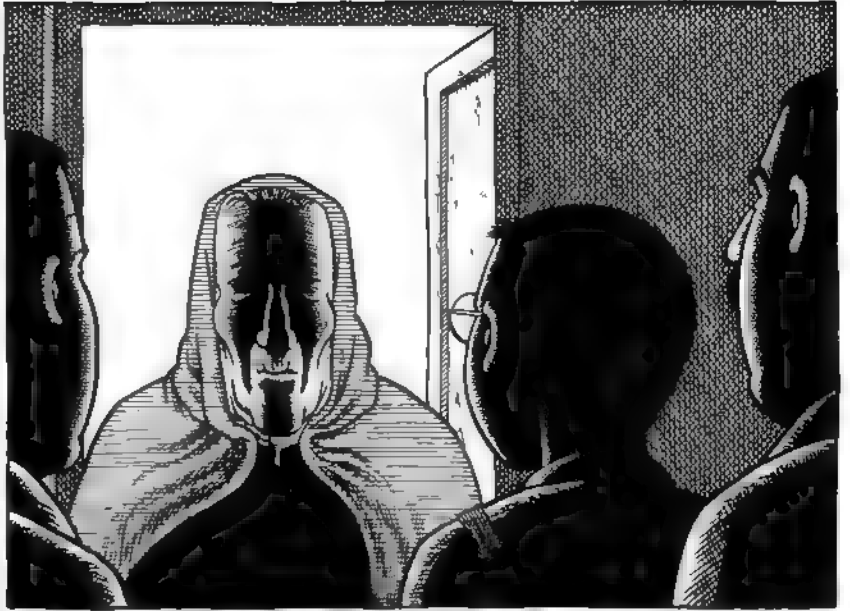


HE GOT MARRIED TO A
CITY WOMAN, FROM JAFFA,
AND SHE WENT TO AMMAN,
AND HE CAME BACK
HERE.



HIS MOTHER DIED WHEN
HE WAS SIX MONTHS OLD,
AND WE HAD TO SEND HIM
TO OUR NEIGHBORS TO
SUCKLE HIM. MANY
NEIGHBORS.





That old woman has lived with her uncertainty for almost 50 years. On the evening of November 12, 1956, perhaps hundreds of uncertainties flared over the fates of loved ones in Rafah.

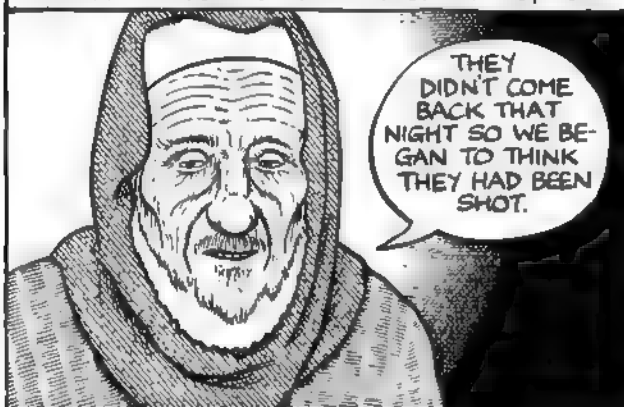
As Mohammed Juma' El-Ghoul told us,

THE BURIALS

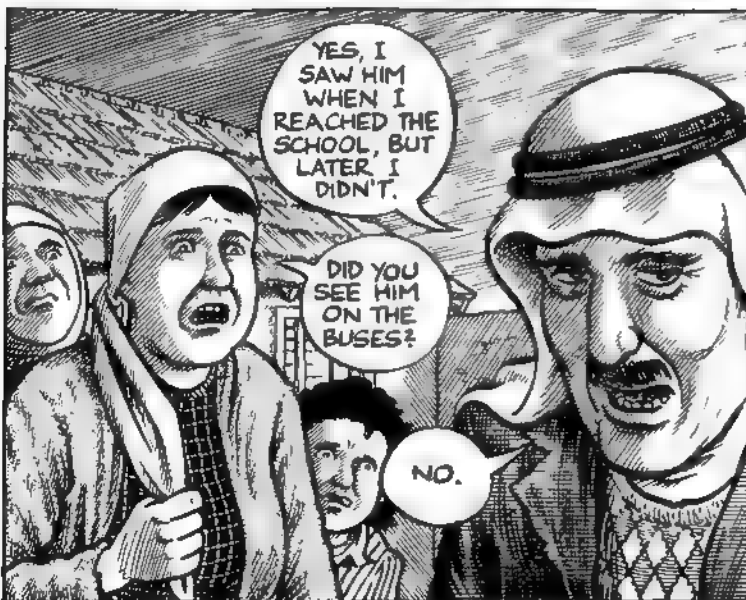
WHO-
EVER
DIDN'T COME
BACK TO HIS
HOUSE...

WAS
DEAD OR
A PRISON-
ER.

Abdelwahab Mahmoud Abdelwahab El-Asmar awaited word about his brother and nephew



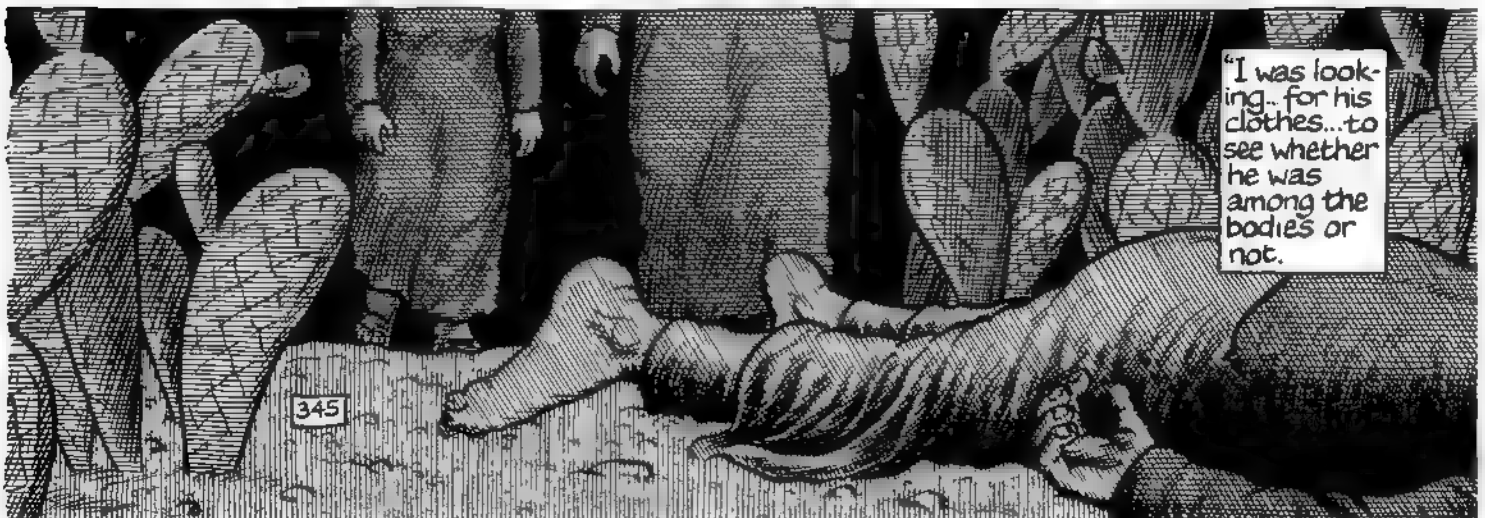
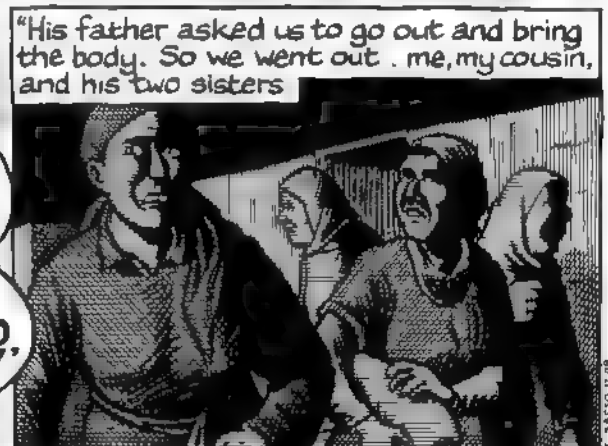
Latifa El-Qeesi wondered about her missing husband.



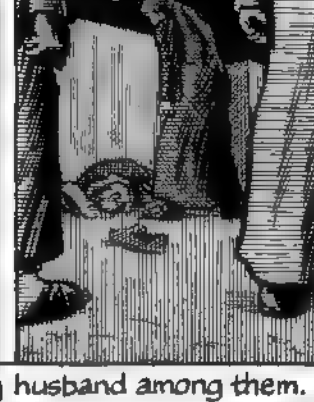
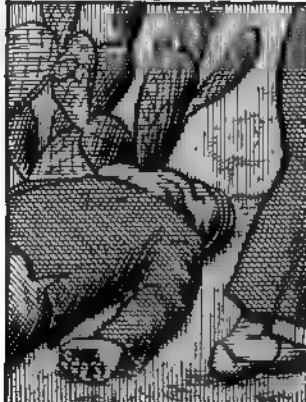
"We spent all night crying because [we] thought he was among the people who had been killed."



7 DALCO 11.08



"I went to the first one...near the cactus tree. Near him [another]. And the third at the door of my parents' home, and another one near to him. Four."



"I didn't find my husband among them."

"[Then] shooting started."

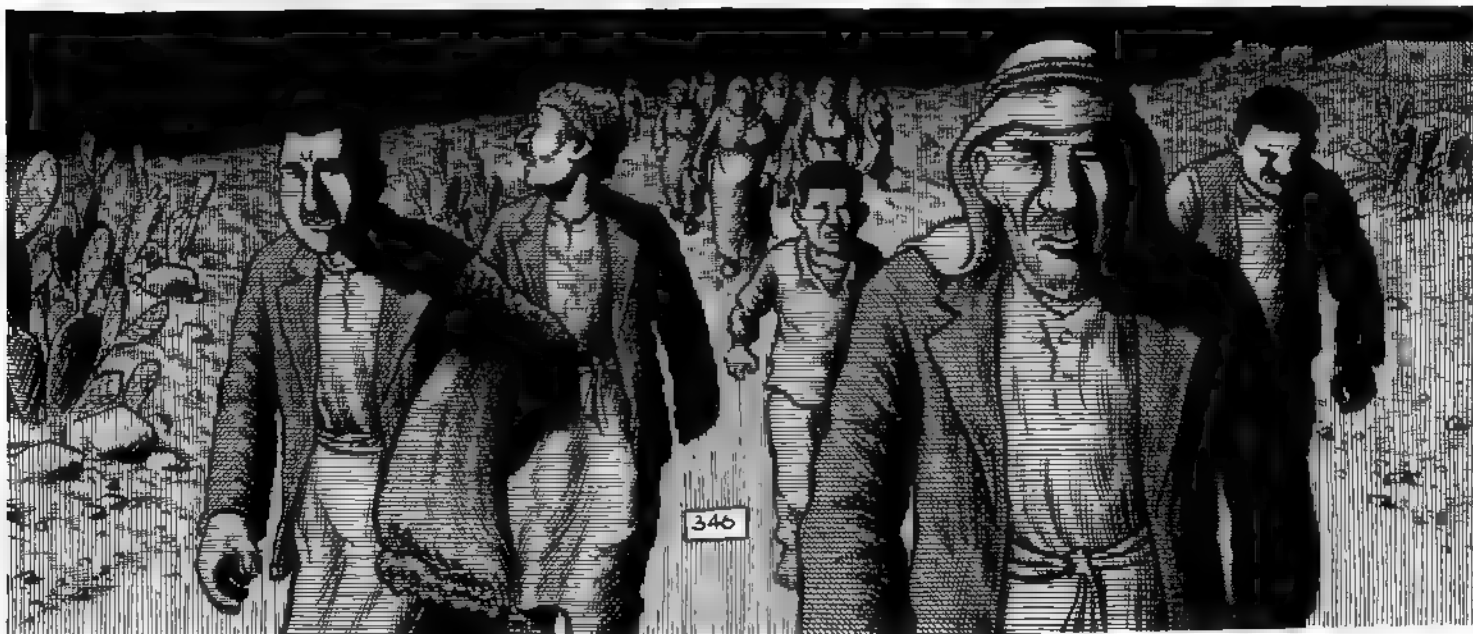
"I was pregnant at that time, five months."

"I wasn't able to run so they left me, and I stayed at my parents'."

News was beginning to spread about the bodies that had been dumped on the matianah in the Tal Zorob neighborhood.

Among the first to go to the site was Owda Abdullah Hejazi, who had seen the trucks taking the dead there.

SOME-ONE FROM OUR FAMILY WAS MISSING... AND HIS FATHER TOLD US, 'LET'S GO FIND HIM.'

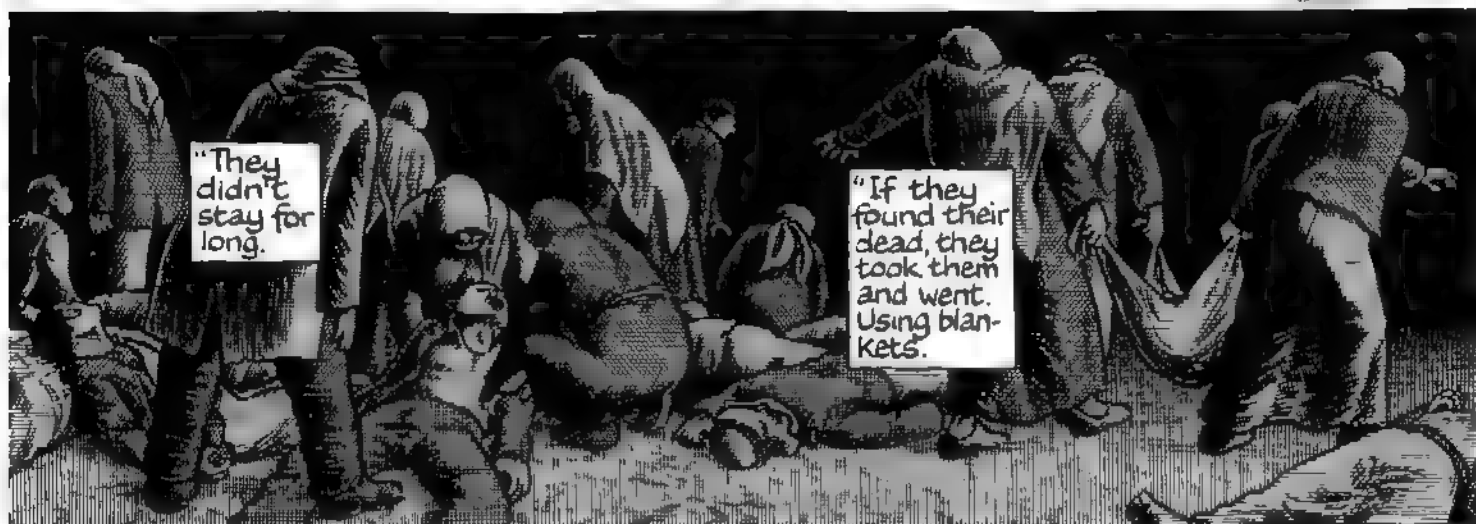




"There were many, many, many people."

"Mostly women, but men also..."

"turning the bodies to look at the faces"



"They didn't stay for long."

"If they found their dead, they took them and went. Using blankets."



"It was horrible..."

"The people were afraid"

"There was no shouting there. No screaming."

"It was slightly like thieving"









We're directed to Block O to meet a man named Abdelrahim Ghanim, who lost a number of relatives that day in 1956.

Perhaps catastrophe follows Abdullah around.

The Israelis have recently demolished his three-story home, which was shared by four related families.

Now the lot of them, 24 people in all, are crammed into the back of a decrepit, empty shop.

His sons would rather talk about the here and now, their destroyed house, not the long-ago event we're hosing off for reconsideration.

THE FLIES WERE ON THE WALLS BECAUSE THEY'D DEMOLISHED THE SEWAGE SYSTEM.

WE KEPT OURSELVES IN THE HOUSE TO THE LAST BECAUSE WE HAD NO OPTIONS, NO OPTIONS.



But Abdullah, who has heart problems and has not worked in 20 years, graciously obliges our inquiries into the past.

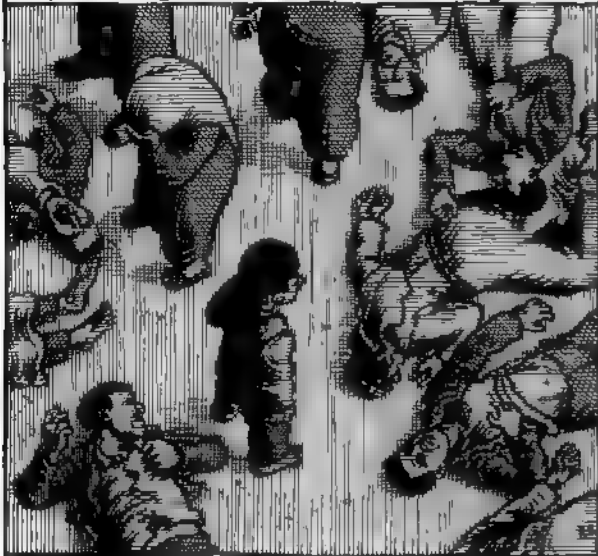


He was a teenager when he went to look for his brother, Ismael Abdelrahim Ghanim, his uncle, Yousef Khalil Ghanim, and his cousin, Issa Mustafa Ghanim.

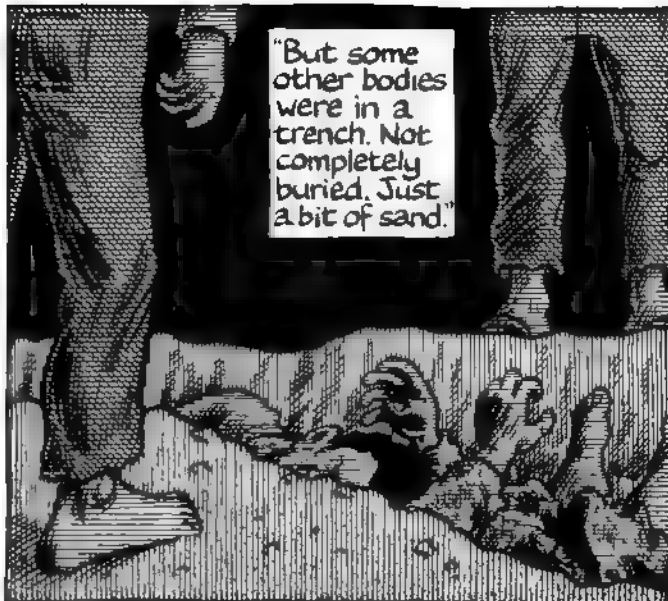
THE PEOPLE TOLD US THEY'D THROWN THEM NEAR TAL ZOROB

MY COUSINS MY BROTHERS, THEIR WIVES... ALL THE WOMEN OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD, WE WENT RUNNING.

"I found my relatives thrown on the ground."



"But some other bodies were in a trench. Not completely buried. Just a bit of sand."



And the number of bodies?

I DIDN'T COUNT THEM, [BUT] MORE THAN 50, 60.

AND THE REST IN THE TRENCH



"The people dug them out."

"At the time you want to take your body and go, that's all. You may help with other bodies if you know them, but the main thing is to get your dead."



"We took all the bodies and buried them in the Tal Zorob cemetery, the western cemetery of Rafah."





The cemetery is now dominated by the IDF tower.



The old cemetery is mostly made up of family tombs—the fugeji—of Rafah's original residents.

Once, before fully understanding its fearsome reputation, Abed and I walked by it to reach the graveyard.



That night no one paid attention to the niceties of ownership. Slabs were removed and bodies handed down to join the corpses of strangers.

ARE YOU AFRAID?

WE USED TO GO PLAY ON THAT MOUND.

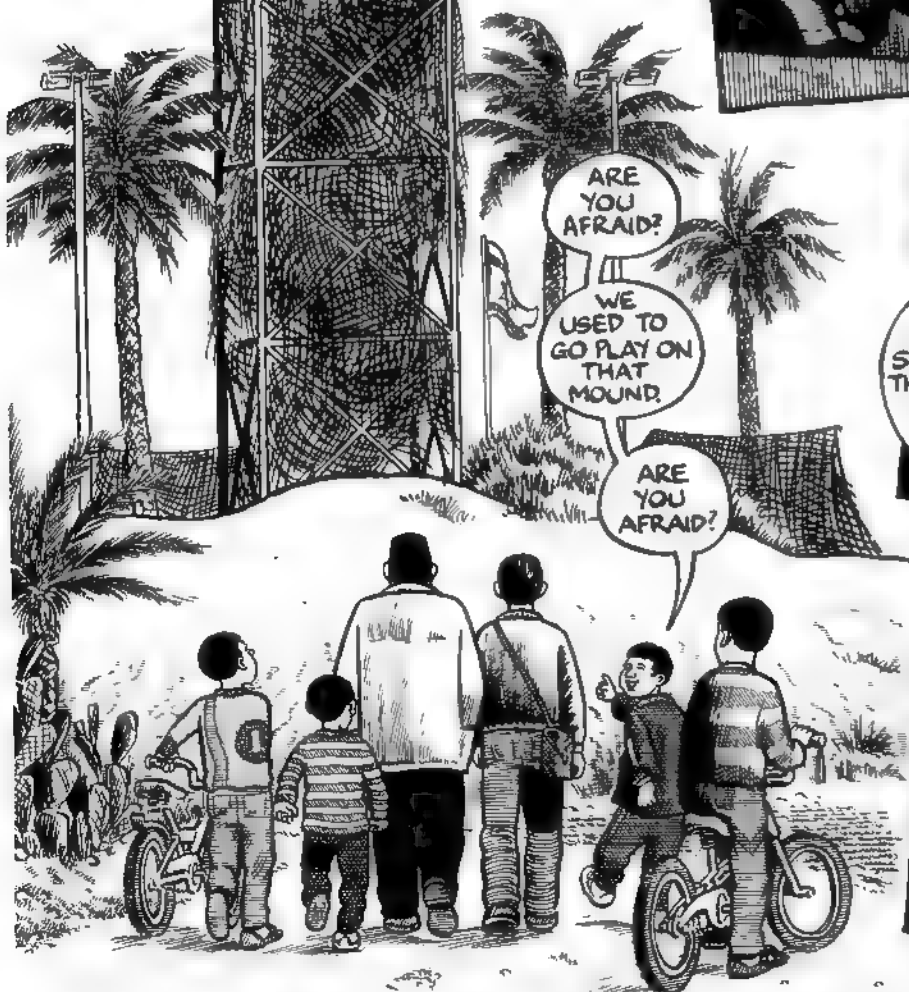
ARE YOU AFRAID?

WE PUT THE BODIES INSIDE THE FUSGEYA AND THEN LEFT IMMEDIATELY.

SOME PEOPLE, A WEEK LATER, STARTED TO TAKE THEIR BODIES FROM THE CEMETERY AND BURY THEM IN OTHER PLACES.

AND YOUR RELATIVES ARE STILL THERE?

YES, UP TILL NOW.



Early in the morning the furtive search for the missing continued

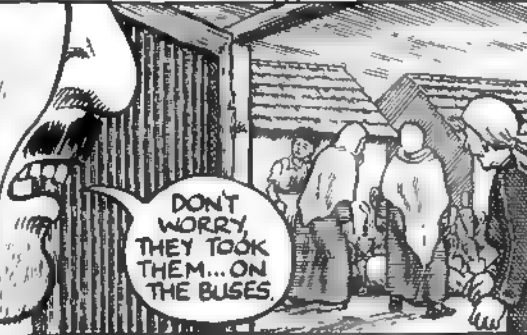


Latifa El-Qeesi looked in the streets for her husband with her mother.

WHEN-
EVER WE
HEARD THE
JEEPS AND VE-
HICLES COMING,
WE HID OUR-
SELVES AMONG
THE HOUSES.



Finally, Latifa met a relative who gave her the news that her husband had been taken prisoner.



DON'T
WORRY,
THEY TOOK
THEM... ON
THE BUSES



Later that morning the Israelis officially lifted the curfew for a short time, allowing the wounded to seek care and others to gather and bury the remaining bodies.



Mariam El-Nayeeli learned that her husband was alive and in the UNRWA clinic.

MANY
PEOPLE CAME
FROM ALL OVER
TO SEE THEIR
RELATIVES.



MANY,
MANY,
MANY
PEOPLE.

3 SACCO 109

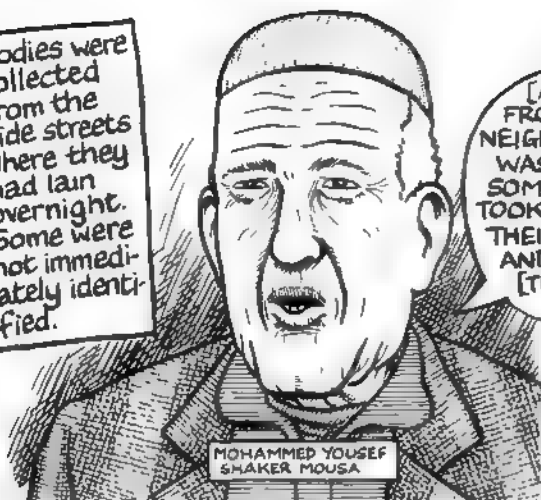


"The soldiers were at the door and prevented us from going inside.

"If I had entered, I would have screamed and made a great [scene].

"But thank God I didn't see [him]."

Bodies were collected from the side streets where they had lain overnight. Some were not immediately identified.



MOHAMMED YOUSEF SHAKER MOUSA

[A MAN FROM THE NEIGHBORHOOD] WAS SHOT... SOME PEOPLE TOOK HIM INTO THEIR HOUSE AND HE DIED [THERE].



"My father and uncle carried him, wrapped in a blanket... to the street and removed the cover from his face to allow the people to see him.



"His family came and recognized him and took him."

Nasrah Felfel's husband had been lying a few meters from her front door since he'd been shot the morning before.

NOW I NEEDED PEOPLE TO HELP ME BURY THE BODY.



"One of his relatives was killed in another area, and they brought his body on a donkey cart and came here..."



"I went with them to the eastern cemetery."





Meanwhile, people rushed to Tal Zorob's matianah where many bodies remained.

I express doubt, but Abdelwahab Mahmoud Abdelwahab El-Asmar insists that while searching for his brother and nephew he counted 133 bodies in two separate groups of dead.

I COUNTED THEM ONE BY ONE.

"At the third group [my brother's] daughter found them.

HERE IS MY FATHER!

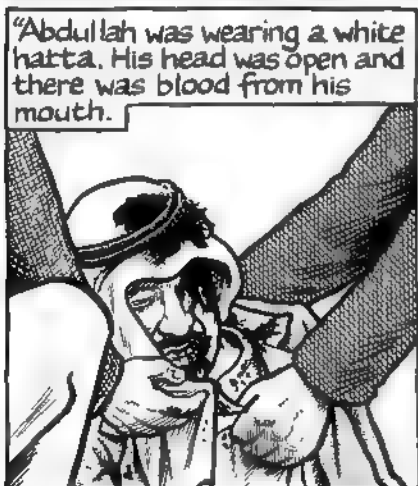
COME!

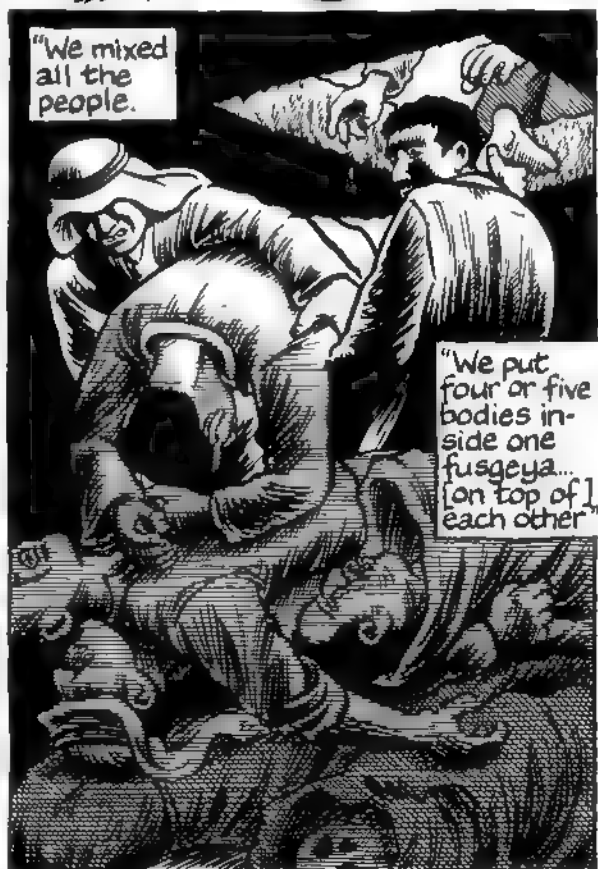
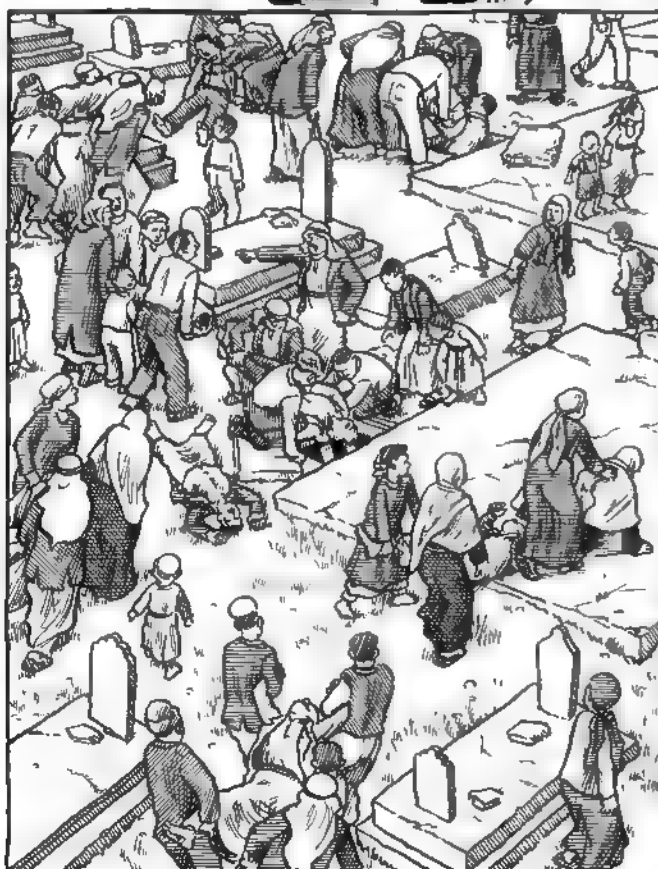
"We covered them with blankets and we buried them [near] the main road. We didn't have time to bury them in another area."

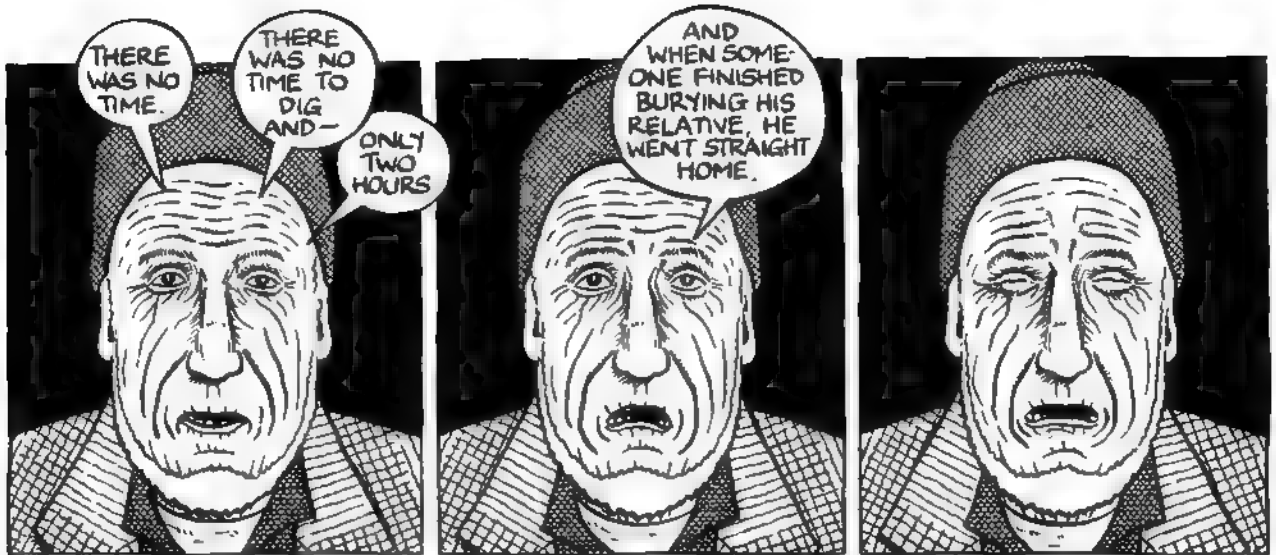


THIRTY DAYS LATER THERE WERE NO CURFEWS, IT WASN'T TENSE. I WENT THERE AND DUG [UP] AND TOOK THE BODIES

Abdelwahab reinterred his relatives in the Tal Zorob cemetery.







Hadba El-Najeeli, whose badly injured brother Mohammed had been taken to Gaza City, was a first grader in 1956

About a week after the killings, she remembers —

"— the women who lost their loved ones gathered by the border screaming and crying, making maltamah.

"Ten or 15 women, 20, they let out their hair and fell on the ground, throwing sand over their heads...



ARMAGEDDON

Sometimes, when shooting erupts and ambulances race by, I realize I hardly know what's going on a kilometer away, much less what's up in Baghdad and Washington.

I'm elsewhere, lost in the filigree of the intricacies of a few hours in November 1956.

Every few days, however, gulping lunch between appointments with Rafah's ancients, Abed fills me in on the fast approaching Armageddon.

CONDA-LEEZZA RICE, WHAT'S SHE SAYING NOW?

ONLY FORCE WILL ELIMINATE THE WEAPONS IN IRAQ.

But while my head is buried in the sands of the past, the rest of Rafah is girding for new realities.

On Salah Al-Din Road masked Hamas men sporting faux suicide belts mix with child squadrons holding up pictures of The Man Who Would Defy The Great Satan.

Amplified orators
shatter our ear-
drums with garbled
denunciations of
the imminent
attack on Iraq,
but Hani, who
helped organize
this demonstra-
tion, will not be
one of them.

Alas, his
prepared
invective
has been
bumped.

A mock tank
and a mock
warplane are
set alight,
and when
the bonfires
of wishful
thinking have
died down,
the show
comes to a
close.

The Hamas men
march away
smartly up Sea
Street, and the
weighed down
schoolboys,
by their books,
can barely keep up

One afternoon, Sameh, the landlord's son, brings us a bottle of fresh water and news.

DEATH



An American woman, one of the International Solidarity Movement activists protesting the demolition of homes in Rafah, has been run over by an Israeli bulldozer.



Abed makes some calls.

The American woman is dead.

Her body is at El-Najjar hospital.

Rafah is one of the most dangerous places in the Palestinian territories.



But while the rest of Gaza has been bursting with violence, Rafah has been relatively quiet in my weeks here.

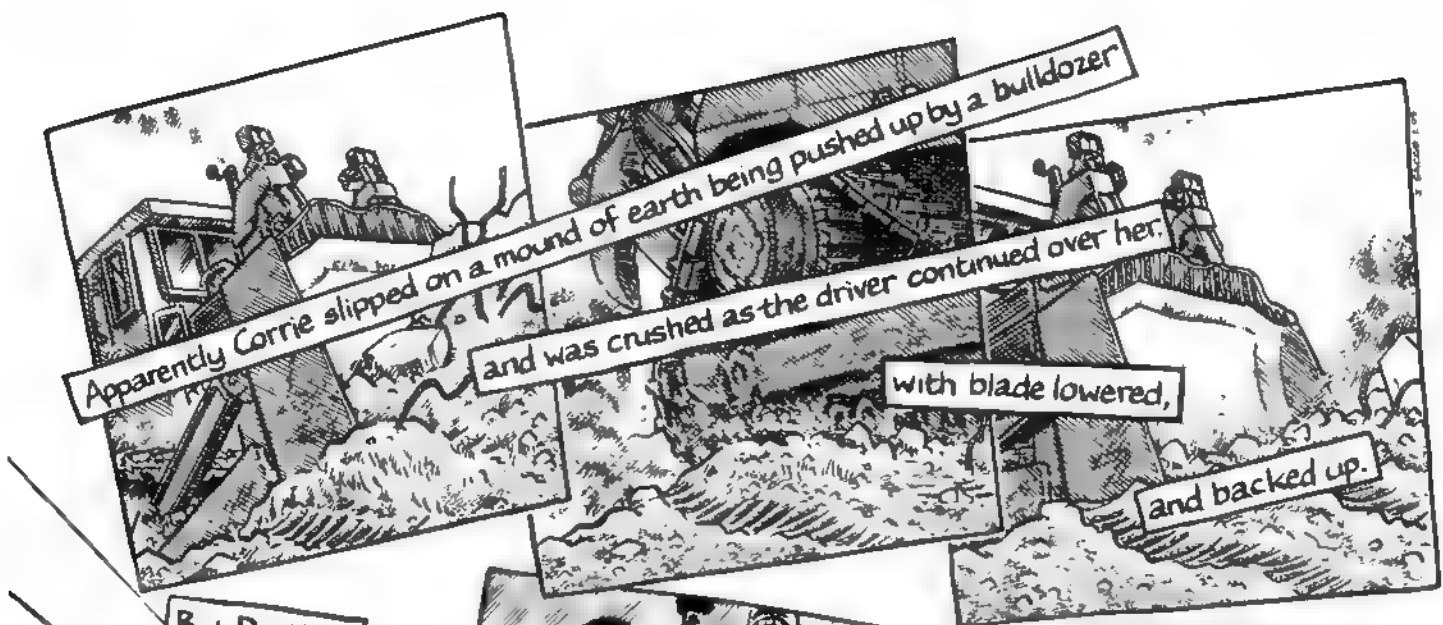


Only three people have been killed: two Islamic Jihad members in a tunnel the Israelis destroyed; and the boy whose funeral we watched from our balcony.

At the hospital I talk to one of the activists who witnessed the death of his colleague.



Rachel Corrie, 23, from Olympia, Washington, was among a group of foreign nationals determined to prevent the demolition of a home in the El-Salam neighborhood.



Apparently Corrie slipped on a mound of earth being pushed up by a bulldozer

and was crushed as the driver continued over her.

with blade lowered,

and backed up.

But Death is not finished with Rafah today.



A Red Crescent ambulance rushes in,

and another casualty is propelled into emergency

Ahmed El-Najjar, 49, who lives in Rafah's Tal El-Sultan neighborhood, was shot by Israeli forces in the head, the chest, and the leg, reportedly while standing in his doorway. In a few minutes he is dead.



His wailing, blood-stained relatives take possession of the body.

But if, like Corrie's friends, they are in shock, there is nothing shocking about what has happened to their kin.

The killing of a Palestinian in Gaza is a routine occurrence. His loss will ripple not a drop outside of his immediate circle of family, friends, and neighbors.

The killing of an American, however —



SHAPES IN THE DARK PT.2

The squeaking sound of armored vehicles, passing endlessly on the Philadelphia Route a few dozen meters from Fuad's place, bounces off the buildings around us.

Fuad keeps the windows slightly open so they won't shatter if there's a blast, and he has long mapped out his avenues of escape.

OUT THE DOOR IF THEY COME FROM THIS SIDE...

OUT THE WINDOW IF THEY COME FROM THIS SIDE

Tonight is the night everyone expects the war against Iraq to begin, and Rafah is bracing for a possible Israeli attack under its cover.

Fuad's parents have pressured him to leave the house, which he watches over, at least during these critical hours, and he has agreed to sleep at our place tonight.

As we head toward Sea Street, we must cross two points where, for a few seconds, no building or obstruction shields us from the Tal Zorob tower's line of sight.



This is near to where the two women and young girl from the Jaber family were rocketed a couple of weeks ago.

We are Fuad and Ashraf and Abed and I.



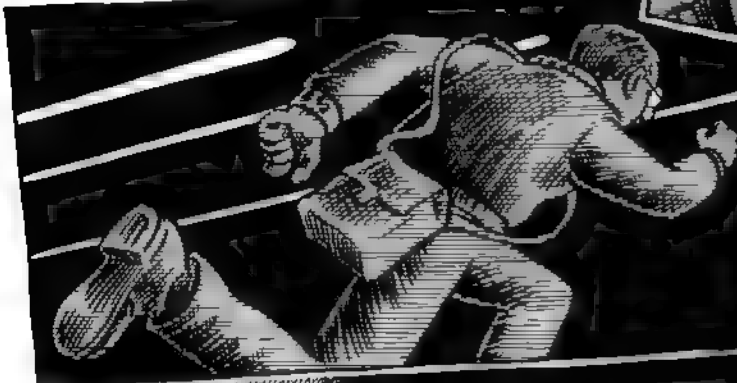
But to a soldier with night-vision equipment a kilometer and a half away we are shapes in the dark near the border area.

Tracer!

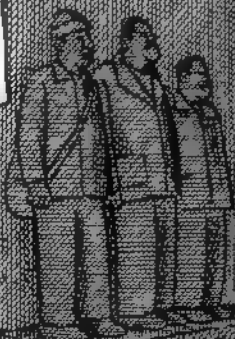
Snapping overhead!



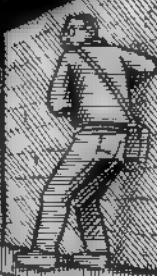
I run to the wall in front of me.

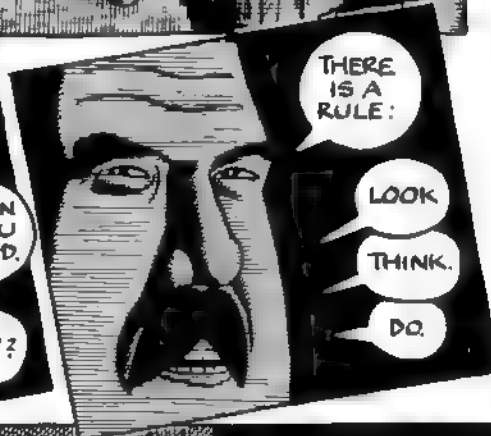
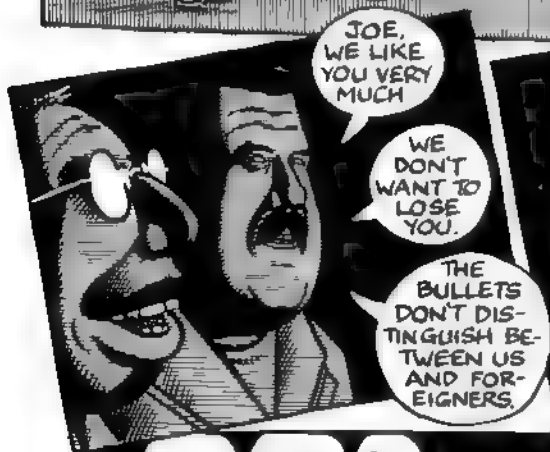
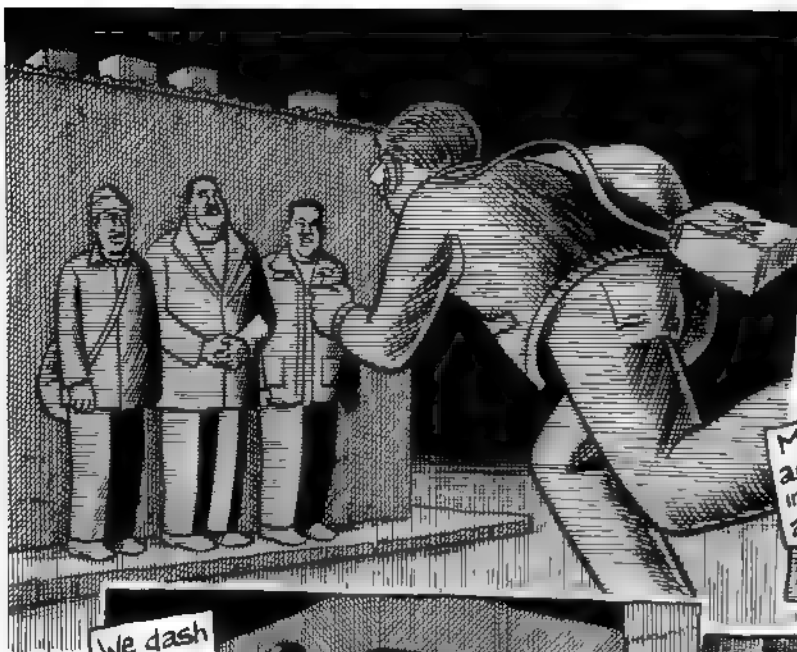


My pals have run back to the wall behind.



The Tal Zorob tower can no longer see them, but it can see me.





DID YOU SEE THEM?

On the first Friday of the Iraq war, over all the other sermons blaring from Rafah's minarets, we strain to catch our own neighborhood imam's ear-splitting fulminations.

ISRAEL, AMERICA, AND BRITAIN: THE THREE PILLARS OF EVIL!

MY BROTHER MUSLIMS SHOULD REALIZE THAT THE FUTURE IS ISLAM'S, BUT FOR THAT WE MUST PAY THE PRICE!

AND PALESTINIANS AND IRAQIS ARE PAYING THE PRICE!



War!

And all the dread of its build-up is now replaced by desire as Palestinians wait and pray for the anti-aircraft fire streaming into the Baghdad night to tear an American bomber from the sky.

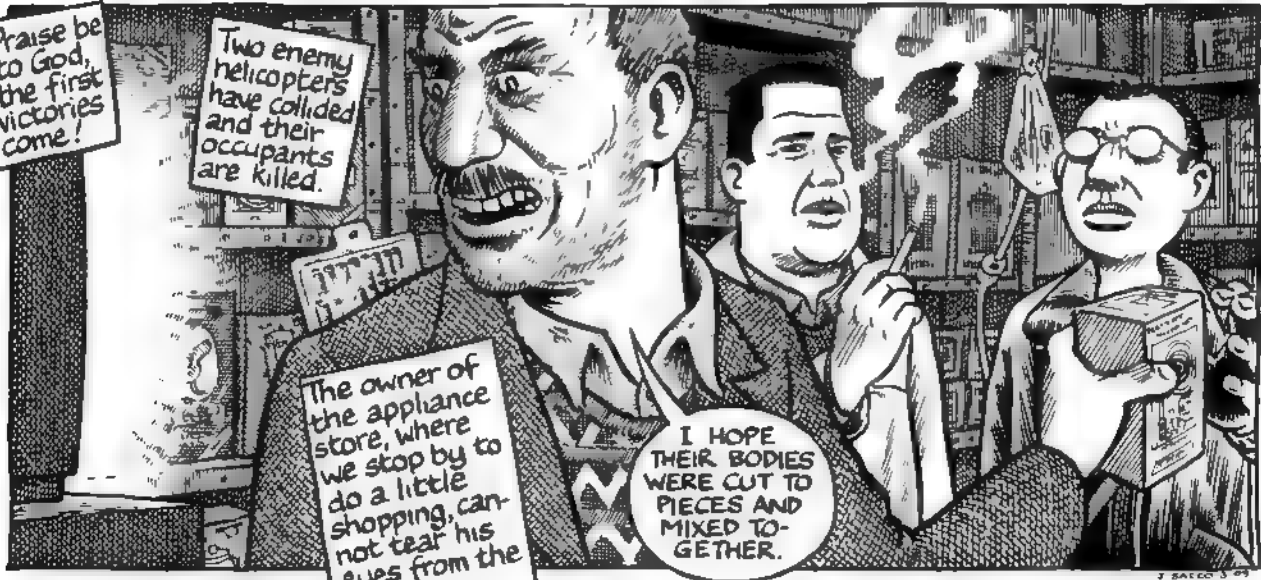


Praise be to God, the first victories come!

Two enemy helicopters have collided and their occupants are killed.

The owner of the appliance store, where we stop by to do a little shopping, cannot tear his eyes from the television.

I HOPE THEIR BODIES WERE CUT TO PIECES AND MIXED TOGETHER.



Khaled has added up the Coalition deaths so far.

ABOUT 23 OR 25.

Abu Ahmed cannot hide his glee that another four Americans have been killed.

And if you add those to the ones killed in the helicopters — what's the total now?

GOD WILLING, GOD WILLING, AMERICA WILL BE BROKEN.

The Western media, they say, is full of lies.

They are watching Abu Dhabi and Al-Jazeera.

Hani prefers Iraqi T.V. He says it makes him feel better.

Saddam Hussein rides across the screen brandishing a sword.

He issues an order for the Bedouin of southern Iraq not to behead all the American prisoners falling into their hands.

Iraqis are burning money to show they don't need cash rewards for killing the invaders.

They will fight, fight, fight!

SADDAM WILL BE VICTORIOUS.

THE ENTIRE ARAB WORLD AND THE WHOLE WORLD IN GENERAL WILL CHANGE OWING TO THE AMERICAN DEFEAT.

He greets children while reports come in of five more tanks destroyed! A sixth aircraft!





But not everyone is so caught up in the cheap propaganda and the minor American setbacks to expect Iraq to prevail.

Khaled's view is the most philosophical.

It is stripped of illusion and seems somehow self-reflective.



CASUALTIES AMONG THE MOB

A new war
has started
while an-
other one,
our war,
Abed's and
mine, namely
the 1956
Suez Crisis,
is winding
down.

In fact
—I didn't
tell you—
it was
already
over when
the inci-
dent in
Rafah
took place.

By then
the big
picture
looked
like this:

British
and French
forces had
launched
an air- and
seaborne
assault
on Egypt's
Port Said
and Port
Fuad on
November
5 and 6.

President
Eisenhower
feared the
Anglo-French
attack would
increase
Soviet influ-
ence in Egypt
and alienate
the entire
Arab world.

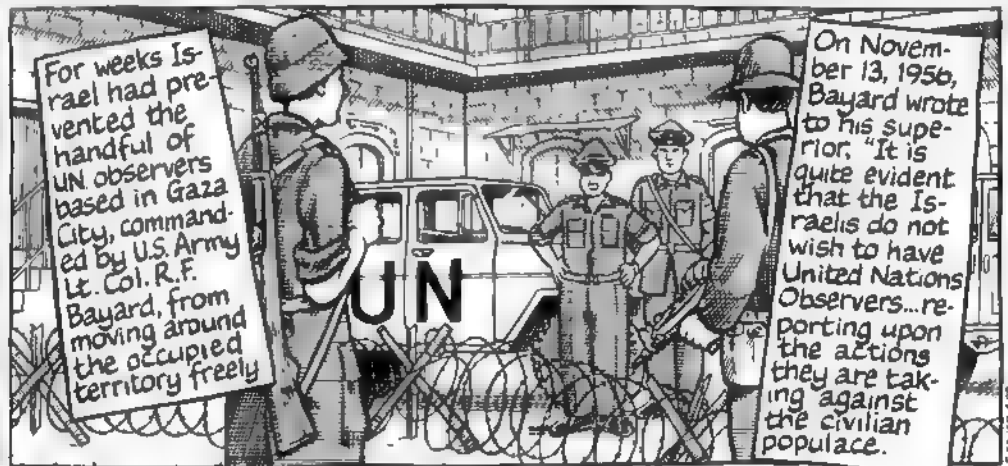
U.S. pressure
forced the
British and
French to
abort their
campaign.
London and
Paris were
humiliated.

Their forces
would leave
Egypt by
December
22, 1956.





But questions had already begun to arise about Israeli behavior in Gaza in general and in Rafah specifically.



Press accounts began to refer to an incident in Rafah in which some 50 Arabs were killed, and UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld wrote to Israeli foreign Minister Golda Meir on November 21 expressing "great concern" about the "situation in the Gaza Strip, in particular Rafah..."



Meir answered that, regarding Rafah, "complete tranquility prevails in the whole area, and relations between the local population and the authorities are amicable."



As to reports of widespread killings by Israeli soldiers, Meir wrote that "rioting instigated by Egyptian agents took place in Rafah on 10 and 12 November"

"During the disorders the UNRWA Food Depot in the town was attacked by an unruly mob and the Israel authorities were compelled to take action to prevent large scale looting and destruction"

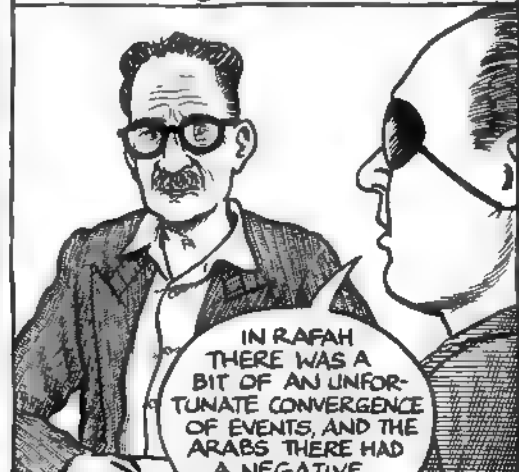
"Order was restored with some difficulty and, regrettably, there were casualties among the mob."



On November 23, the 13 Knesset members of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee had their own questions for IDF Chief of Staff Dayan about the conduct of Israeli forces in Gaza. In a closed door session he assured them that while in "borderline" circumstances some units may have fired on those who might otherwise have been captured,



MK Moshe Aram wanted to know, "What exactly happened in Rafah?"



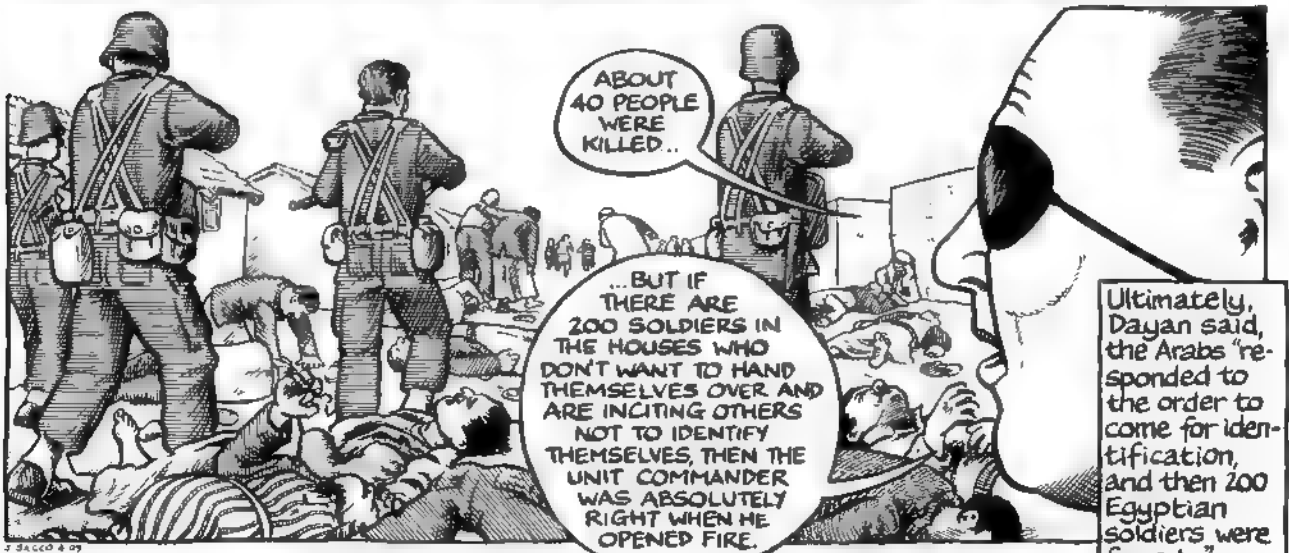
"Our unit left the area during a change-over of units, the second unit hadn't yet entered the area...and [Rafah's residents] were sure that we'd left without intending to come back."

The second unit, Dayan explained, entered the next day to search for arms and Egyptian soldiers.

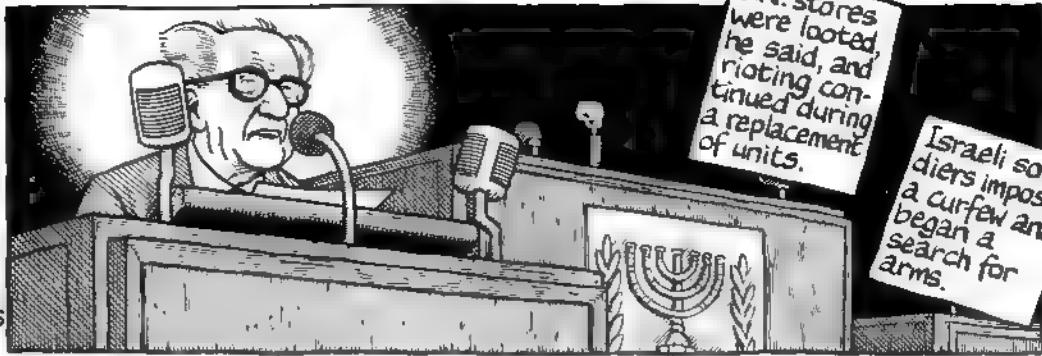
...THEY ANNOUNCED A CURFEW ON THE LOUDSPEAKERS AND THAT ALL THE MEN HAD TO ASSEMBLE, AND NOT ONLY DID THEY NOT SHOW UP BUT THEY PAID NO ATTENTION TO THE CURFEW INSTRUCTIONS.

"There were a lot of Egyptian soldiers and a lot of arms among this big group of Arabs who weren't listening to the instructions, which is why I said a certain disposition was involved"

SO THE UNIT OPENED FIRE. I DON'T KNOW WHERE THEY FIRED AND WHETHER THE ARABS FIRED.

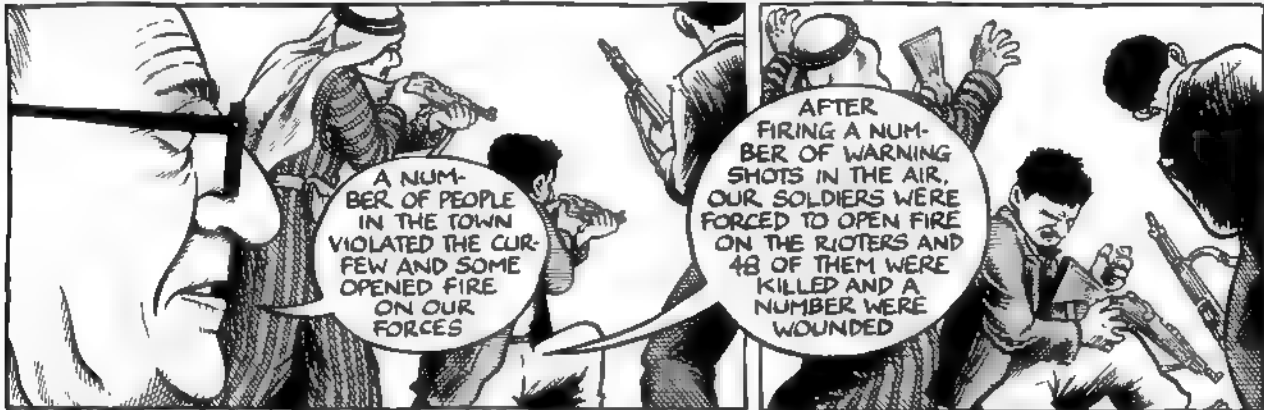


On November 28, Ben-Gurion rejected a proposal to debate the Rafah incident in the Knesset but offered an explanation that combined and added to elements of Meir's and Dayan's accounts.



U.N. stores were looted, he said, and rioting continued during a replacement of units.

Israeli soldiers imposed a curfew and began a search for arms.



A NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN THE TOWN VIOLATED THE CURFEW AND SOME OPENED FIRE ON OUR FORCES

AFTER FIRING A NUMBER OF WARNING SHOTS IN THE AIR, OUR SOLDIERS WERE FORCED TO OPEN FIRE ON THE RIOTERS AND 48 OF THEM WERE KILLED AND A NUMBER WERE WOUNDED

In the same Special Report for the U.N. General Assembly which outlined the killings in Khan Yunis, UNRWA navigated between the competing claims about what had happened in Rafah.

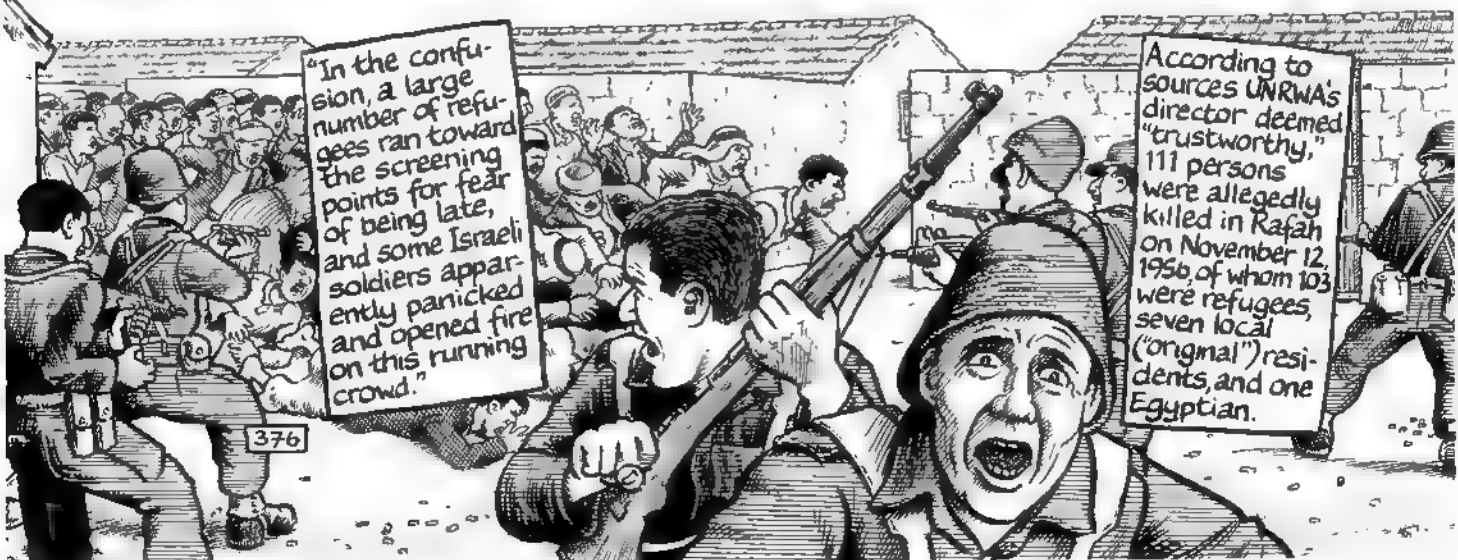
"The Israel authorities in Gaza state that the attitude of the refugees in Rafah camp was hostile and that there was some resistance to the screening operation, during which the casualties occurred."

...the designated hour. In the confusion, a large number of refugees ran toward the screening points, some of them being late, and some Israel soldiers panicked and opened fire on this running crowd.

"The refugees deny any such resistance."

The "facts appear to be," UNRWA concluded, that some refugees did not hear the loud-speakers calling on them to gather and that not enough time was allowed for the men to reach the designated screening sites.

...for the men to reach the designated screening sites. ... trustworthy lists of names of persons who were killed at Rafah on 12 November, numbering 111 of whom 103 were refugees, seven local residents, and one Egyptian.



"In the confusion, a large number of refugees ran toward the screening points for fear of being late, and some Israeli soldiers apparently panicked and opened fire on this running crowd."

According to sources UNRWA's director deemed "trustworthy," 111 persons were allegedly killed in Rafah on November 12, 1956, of whom 103 were refugees, seven local ("original") residents, and one Egyptian.

The Israelis and the Egyptians eventually exchanged prisoners, and those bussed from Rafah to Atlit prison in Israel came home

RETURN

Mohammed Atwa El-Najeeli, badly wounded on November 12, 1956, remained in Gaza City hospitals for some three months.

Now he laughs about the experience

MY FRIEND CAME TO SEE ME AFTER TEN DAYS

HE WALKED ALL THE WAY FROM RAFAH TO GAZA CITY ALONG THE BEACH TO FIND ME

"He told me,"

ARE YOU OKAY, MOHAMMED?

AM I OKAY?

WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?

I ask his wife, Mariam, about her feelings while Mohammed was away

I WAS PREGNANT.

I WAS NOT ABLE TO WALK FROM HERE TO GAZA CITY.

BUT I USED TO SEND FOOD FOR HIM WITH THE AMBULANCES.

AND CLOTHES.

THE AMBULANCES BROUGHT ME THE CLOTHES [IN WHICH] HE WAS SHOT.

THEY HAD BEEN CUT BY SCISSORS

HIS LONG UNDERWEAR WAS FULL OF BLOOD.

"I washed all those clothes and his underwear."

"What was in my mind?"

"I was crazy"

"I was mad"

"I was crazy seeing that this happened to my husband,"

MY LOVER



These are my last days in Rafah, and I spend as much time as I can with the people I've met in Block J.

We pay Fuad a final visit.

ABANDONED

Birds have taken up residence in the bullet holes inside his house.

THEY CAN GET COMPENSATION FROM UNRWA IF THEIR NESTS ARE DEMOLISHED.

We walk over to Ashraf's damaged home. His dad no longer makes the daily pilgrimage.

When the Israelis finally knock down the house they can, without compunction, claim it was an "abandoned" structure.

Technically — and what are some lies but shameless technicalities? — that will be true

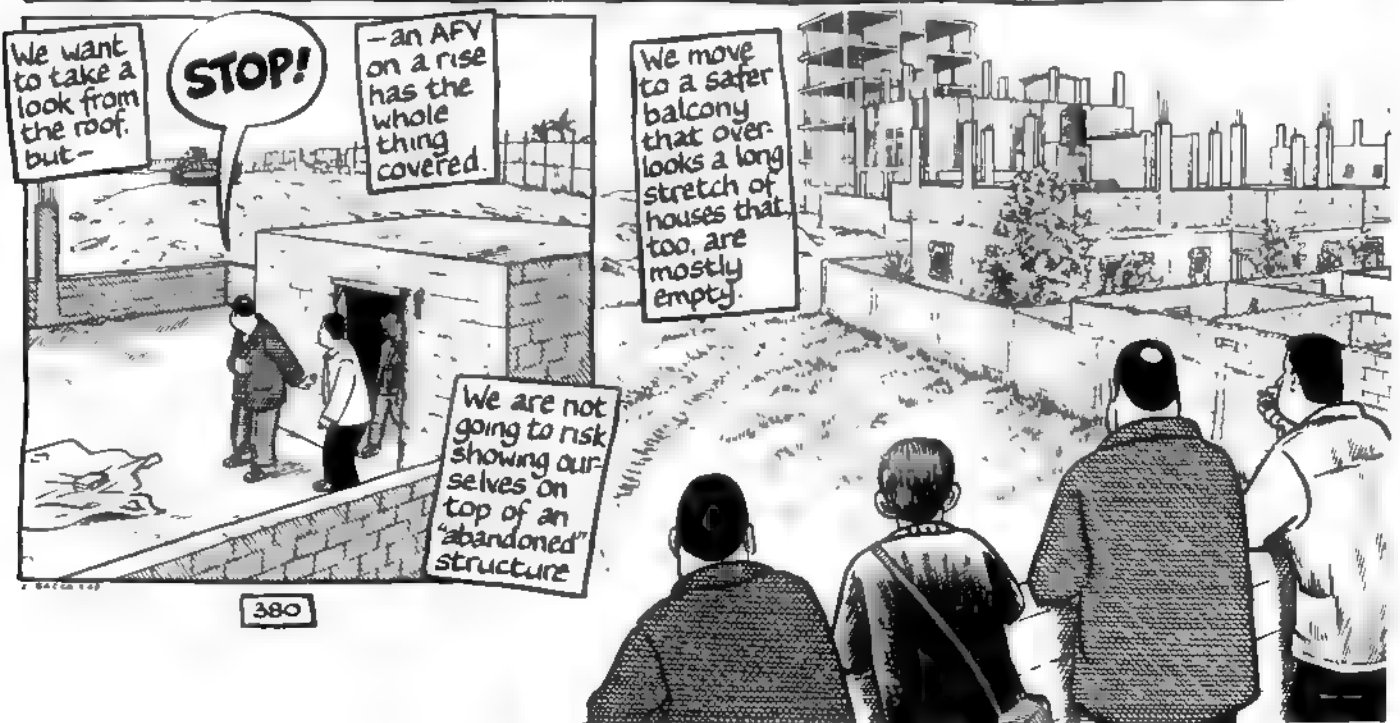
ALL THESE ARE NEW.

But even now, with another row of bullet holes in the wall, Ashraf and his family continue to assert ownership of the battered home.

They have blocked up the windows and doors with bricks and corrugated metal to keep out unwanted guests, particularly militants.



We enter through what Ashraf calls a "secret door," a hatch set above ground level.

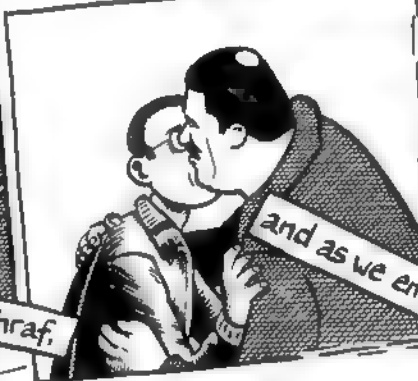


In the other direction Fuad calls out to the Egyptian soldiers across the border who are checking us out with binoculars.

They do not return the greeting.



I say farewell to Fuad.



A horse hitched to a cart bolts past us.

and so we have our last laugh.

SEA STREET

We're finished with our 1956 story.

Perhaps there were more revelations to uncover and accounts to hear, but we have reached the point of diminishing returns, and now we cut the cord and let the rest slide into oblivion.

The historian could keep on digging, but he's tired now, he wants to get on with his own life, and he knows the reader does, too.

The taxi will take us down Sea Street one last time.

We'll drive out of Rafah to Khan Younis and then, Abu Houli checkpoint willing, on to Gaza City.

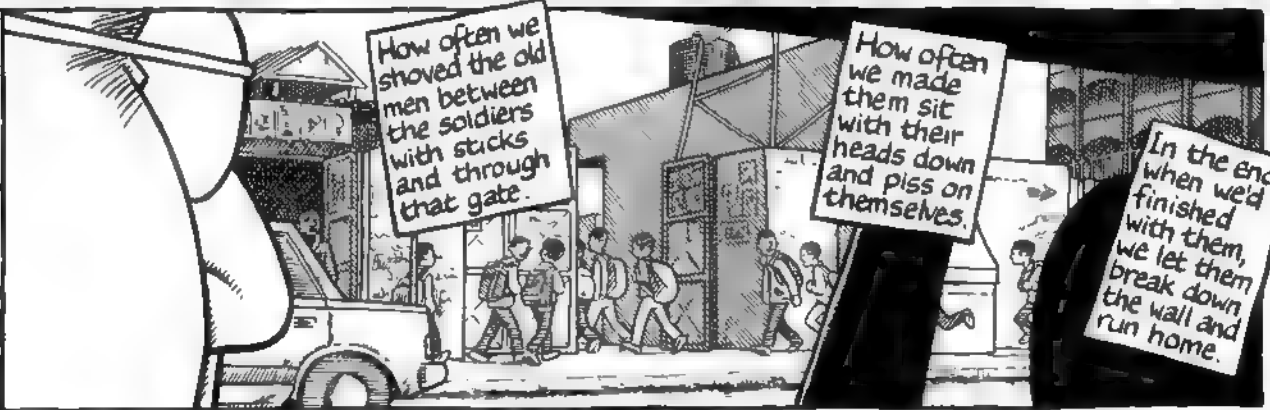
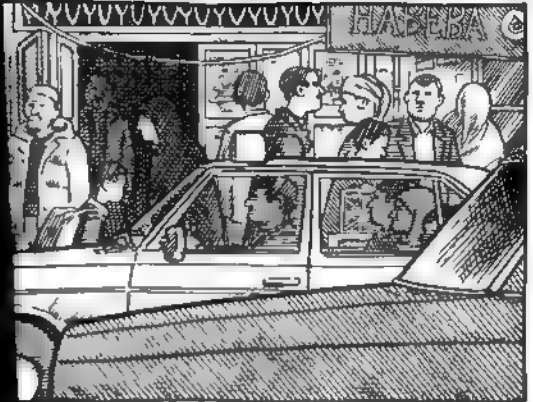
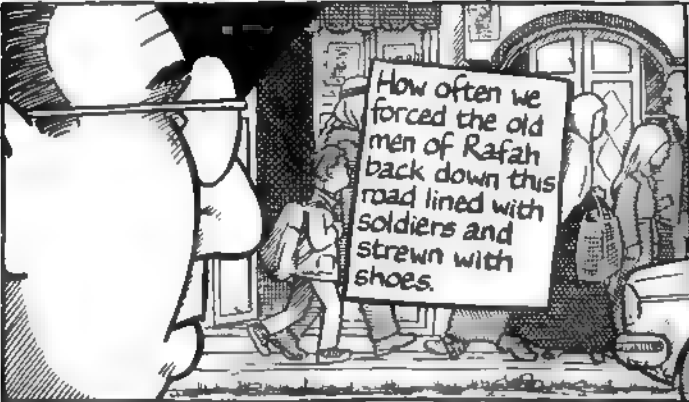
I'll be in Jerusalem tomorrow, in Europe in a few days.

Sea Street!

Honking and bustling, drowning out whatever squeaking bulldozers might be at work a few hundred meters to the south.

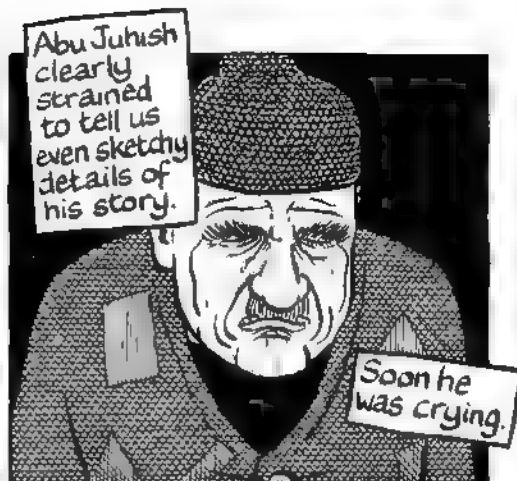
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Abed and I came here to find out what happened on November 12, 1956, and now, arguably, we are the world's foremost experts.

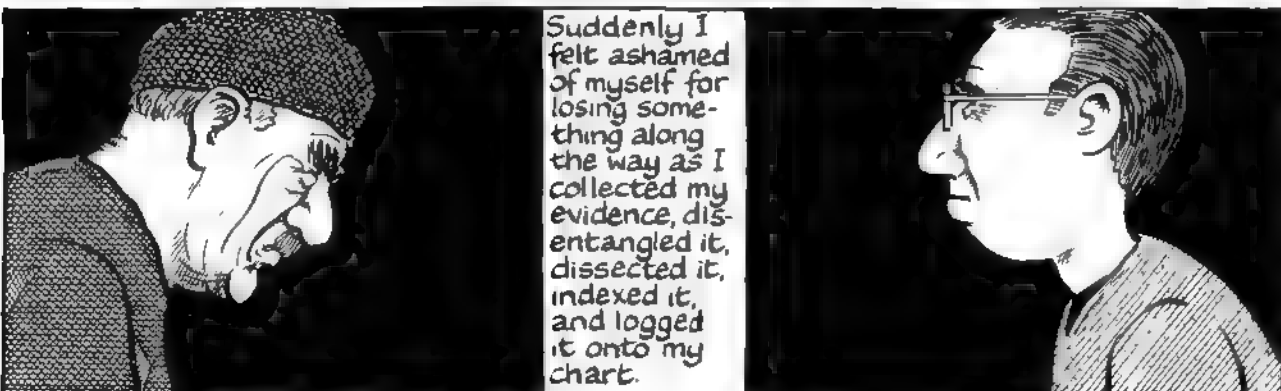


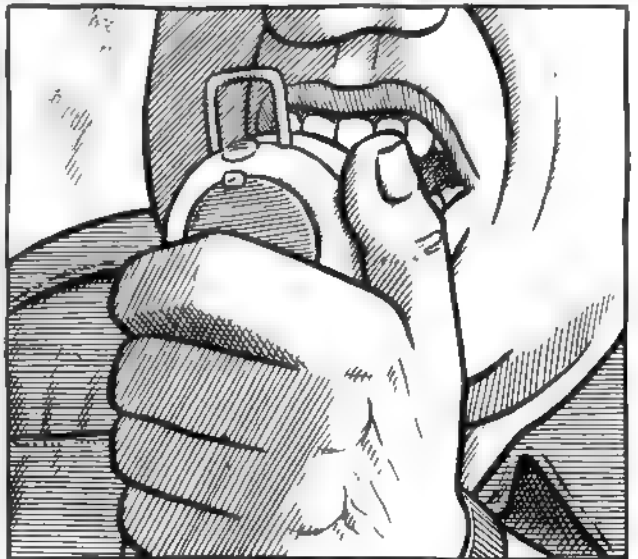
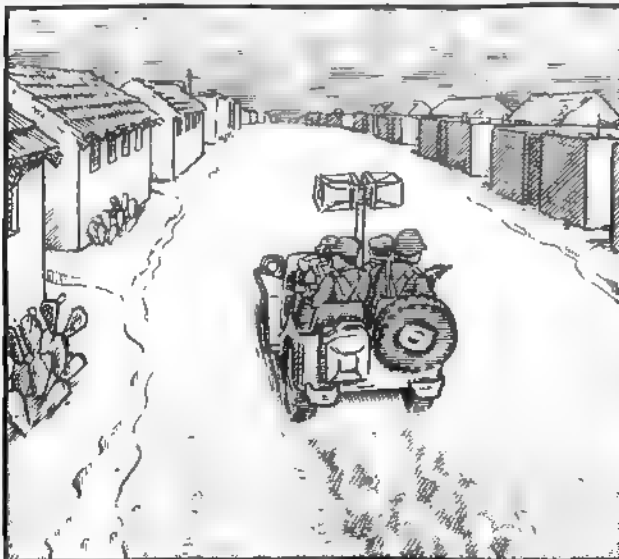
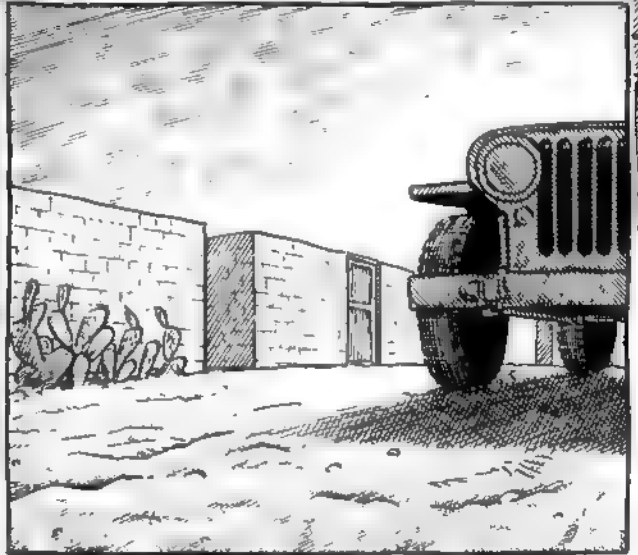
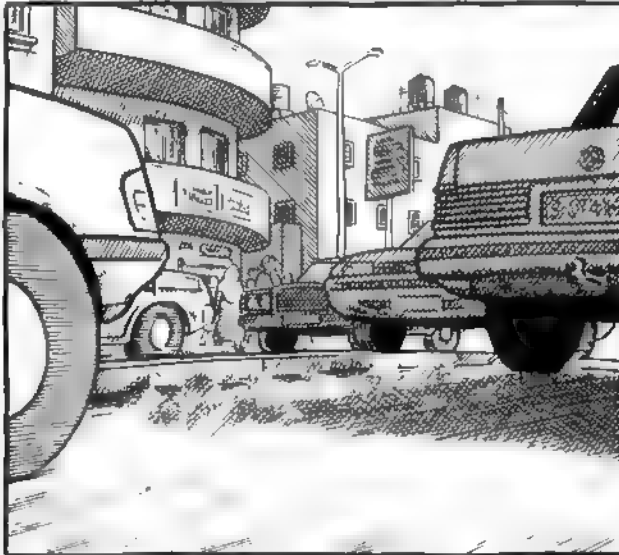
As we negotiate the traffic, I recall one of our final interviews. It was with the grandfather of one of Abed's pals.

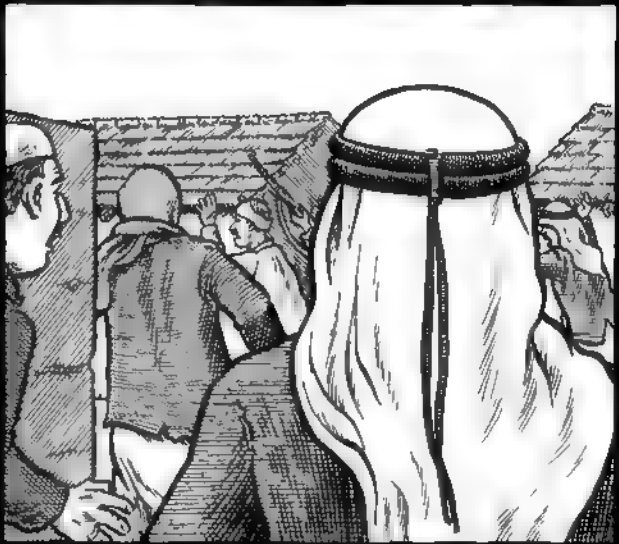


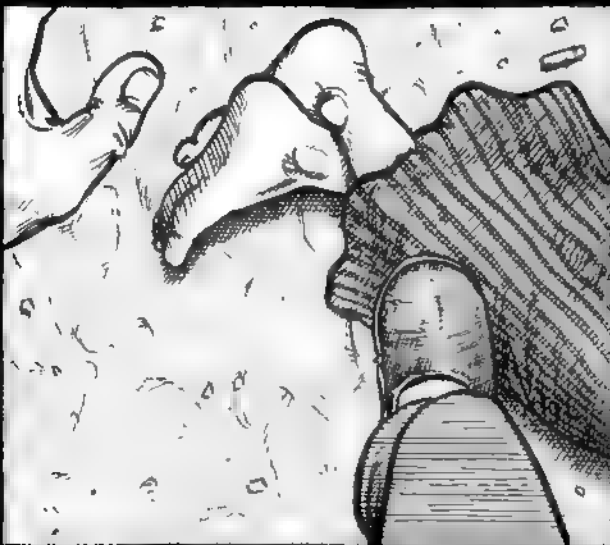


It wasn't the first time one of the old men had cried in front of us, and I knew how to handle it.











APPENDIX 1

DOCUMENTS AND SOURCES, 1956

A historical investigation into any particular incident can seldom ever be truly complete. Scratching further might uncover something new and significant—an unopened file or a long-lost letter, for example. This book is chiefly dependent on the oral testimony of Palestinians asked to recall the tragic events in Khan Younis and Rafah in November 1956. As much as possible I have tried to present the available documentary evidence to supplement these personal accounts. I visited the U.N.'s archives in New York a number of times and contracted two Israeli researchers to dig through Israeli archives as well.

Below, I present extended cullings from some of the documents I quoted in the book to provide more context for the interested reader. Also included are selected newspaper reports from the period (many of which provide much misinformation), as well as additional comments by Mordechai Bar-On, chef de bureau to IDF chief of staff Moshe Dayan in 1956, whose knowledge of the Israeli perspective is intimate. My brief commentaries follow when appropriate. Readers are alerted in those cases where words on old, photocopied documents were difficult to read.

Letter from Lieutenant Colonel (U.S. Army) R. F. Bayard, chairman of the Egyptian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission [U.N. observers] to Colonel Leary, acting chief of staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), November 13, 1956 (see p. 373):

Dear Colonel Leary,

I felt that it is about time I got a letter off to you in order to keep you informed of conditions in general in the Gaza Strip as we see it. It is quite evident that the Israelis do not wish to have United Nations Observers circulating in the Strip and reporting upon the actions they are taking against the civilian populace. From the reports we receive from UNRWA personnel and from the very few incidents that have been witnessed by Observers, I have come to the conclusion that the treatment of civilians is unwarrantably rough and that a good number of persons have been shot down in cold blood for no apparent reason. It seems to me that representatives of the International Red Cross should be present on the scene. Of course, we hear many rumours of atrocities, much of which we can discount, but a small percentage are probably factual. No doubt it would be quite embarrassing to the Israelis if we could circulate freely and report upon these incidents. We will keep a written record of those incidents reported to us by UNRWA personnel. Mr. [Thomas] Jamieson [an UNRWA official] states that many key

UNRWA native personnel are missing from the camps and are believed to have been executed by the Israelis. . . .

Many Israeli soldiers have robbed civilians, taking watches, rings, fountain pens, etc. away from the Arabs either in their homes or on the streets. Every vehicle and every bicycle [in Gaza City] has been confiscated. Private workshops and machine shops have been stripped of all mechanical tools. Many mules and horses have been taken and cloth has been taken from the stores.

I have been visited on several occasions by the more prominent Palestinians with a request for assistance. The Palestinians begged us, the UNTSO, not to leave and state that as long as we remain the people have some hope and confidence in the future....

Life here is very easy as far as we of the UNTSO are concerned. However, it is unpleasant to witness the treatment of the local populace and particularly to note the indignities directed upon personnel friends....

Best regards,

R. F. Bayard

Lt. Col. US Army

Chairman

On November 18, 1956, the IDF Southern Command Headquarters sent a top-secret communiqué tasking two officers with investigating the "Rafah incident."

Re: Appointment of an inquiry commission into a search in RAFAH 12/11/1956 in which 40 [or 60—original unclear] were killed and 20 injured

1. In light of my authority, according to High Command regulations (1955), I, General Haim Laskov, Chief of the Southern Command, hereby appoint you:

Colonel Arie Reiss, chairman

Captain Herzl Golan, member

members in the above mentioned inquiry commission.

...

3. To receive first-hand details, you will approach the military governor of Gaza.
4. The inquiry report original with 3 copies will be personally handed by you to the Command adjutant administrative officer no later than the 25th of Nov. 56.

Whatever report Colonel Reiss and Captain Golan submitted could not be found in the IDF archive by my researcher.

A five-page classified IDF report, dated November 25, 1956, entitled "Problems in the Gaza Strip and Outlines for Intelligence Activity," and signed by Officer Avshalom Shmueli, notes:

8. Searches and operations by our forces:

- E. During searches the governor's loudspeakers were used. It was recently agreed that the governor is responsible for detailed orders regarding search procedures. This after exposure of a search in Rafah in which tens of Arabs were killed. According to a rumor, the leak to the press, in this case, came from the governor's circles.

Article from the *Times* (London), dateline Tel Aviv, November 18, 1956, by "Our Correspondent":

REPORTS OF SHOOTING OF ARABS

Reports of indiscriminate shooting of Arabs by Israel troops occupying the Gaza strip [*sic*] continue to circulate here and are causing the Government much concern. . . .

The worst of these unfortunate shooting incidents, which seem to have gone on at intervals all last week, took place at the refugee camp of Rafah last Tuesday [*sic*: it was a Monday]. According to an U.N.R.W.A. field director, Mr. T. Jameson [*sic*: Thomas Jamieson], at least 60 refugees were killed and 30 were seriously wounded when fire was opened by an Israel unit which, as it approached Rafah camp, saw what its officer took to be an organized attempt by some thousands of refugees to break out and loot U.N.R.W.A. stores. Arab sources at Rafah put the dead at a much higher figure.

The commander of the Israel forces in the Gaza area, Colonel Chaim Gaon [*sic*: Haim Gaon], says that 12 men of Rafah camp "may have been killed" and their bodies taken away by members of their families who, in refugee-fashion, are reluctant to admit their dead and so lose a part of their U.N.R.W.A. rations, which are drawn by heads of families only.

A MISUNDERSTANDING

The Rafah incident seems to have had its origin in a mishap which reflects upon the military organization of the district. Apparently an Israel unit which had been on guard at the camp and had taken part in the screening of refugees withdrew from the camp—which is sprawled over and around Rafah township—before its relief had arrived. The refugees, many of whom had been standing about in a big enclosure waiting to be screened, are thought then to have assumed that the Israel Army was withdrawing behind the old armistice lines and to have taken what must have seemed a heaven-sent opportunity to loot U.N.R.W.A. stores.

According to U.N.R.W.A. field officers, however, the amount of looting was negligible. It is probable that the Israel relieving unit, faced by some thousands of Arabs who looked as if they might be in a riotous mood, lost its nerve. There is no doubt that the Arabs, caught out of bounds and probably up to mischief lost their nerves when they caught sight of the approaching Israel soldiers. The result was the unnecessarily bloody episode of the kind Israel's enemies are likely to turn to damaging account against her.

Officials of the U.N.R.W.A. and other observers who have been trying to get at the real truth of the Rafah shooting and other incidents of last week do not accuse Israelis of any deliberate brutality. On the whole Israel soldiers have behaved well....

The Israeli newspaper *Kol Ha'am* reported the following on November 20, 1956:

SECURITY COUNCIL CALLED ON TO PREVENT FURTHER MASSACRE OF ARABS IN THE GAZA STRIP

(U.N. Headquarters; UP service) Today the director of the office for Palestinian refugees in New York, Dr. Issam Tanum [or Tanus—original unclear], in a memo to the Security Council, accused Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip of preparing for “genocide”—mass destruction—among the refugees.

[Tanum/s] demanded that the council take immediate steps to prevent further slaughter. He claimed that 50 refugees have been murdered in cold blood.

THE BRITISH PRESS ON THE DISTURBANCES

London: Today the press has published many accounts of the incidents in the Gaza Strip which involved Arab refugees and Israeli soldiers. A writer for the *Daily Express*, Donald Wise, reported that Israeli soldiers had leaped from trucks to beat citizens, and he quoted a UN spokesman who claimed that 59 Arabs had died in the recent incidents.

A writer for the *New Chronicle* reports an Arab account from Gaza which said, “If Colonel Bayard, head of the UN in Gaza, hadn’t remained here, I’m sure that thousands of refugees in Gaza and the surroundings would have been killed. Anyone who sets out on the path of slaughter and destruction in cold blood, whether he’s Arab or Israeli, doesn’t want UN witnesses.” Reporter Peter Vane [name unclear] writes that the Israelis have tried their hardest to remove Bayard from the area.

The *Times* reporter in Tel Aviv has also written about the events in Rafah.

***Kol Ha'am* reported the following on November 21, 1956:**

THE OFFICIAL VERSION

In relation to the events in Rafah, the military commander of the Gaza Strip, Lt. Colonel Haim Gaon, gave the following version to representatives of the press who were touring the area on November 18:

On the tenth of November IDF forces in Rafah were replaced. The residents, who assumed that the IDF was leaving the town, began looting UNRWA warehouses and protesting at the military command headquarters. According to the military commander, they fired at the headquarters and at vehicles on the roads. The rioting continued through the next day, November 11. The IDF sealed the town and on the following day, November 12, imposed a curfew and carried out searches. The residents of Rafah were ordered to show some identification. They displayed passive resistance and in some cases active resistance. One sergeant was injured by their shooting. The army was given orders to bring the men out of their houses by force. Some began fleeing toward the sand dunes, according to Lt. Colonel Gaon, but steps were taken to prevent their escape. During the operation there were 30 casualties, including both dead and wounded. The military commander reported that the searches resulted in the arrest of 200 Egyptian soldiers, 150 Palestinian soldiers, a few suspected Fedayeen and many other suspects.

The residents of occupied Rafah are still in shock from the terrible events of the past week. They are also full of rage [blank—censored].

The military commander of the Gaza Strip published orders for anyone traveling in Gaza in which he declared that the population is hostile and forbade visitors from making contact with residents.

Letter from U.N. Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld to Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir, November 21, 1956 (see p. 374):

According to information received which I must consider as reliable, the situation in the Gaza Strip, in particular Rafah, has been one giving rise to great concern. I will not here go into the question of the reasons for this unrest, nor into the information we have on the casualties ensuing. I hope that the situation has improved, and I gather from you that according to your information that is the case. However, the situation remains one which I cannot disregard in the execution of my obligations under the relevant General Assembly Resolutions. The other day I addressed to you a request that observers from the United Nations Emergency Force be permitted to enter to be stationed and to function within the Gaza area. I now wish to repeat this request....

Letter in reply from Foreign Minister Meir, November 21, 1956 (see p. 374):

I refer to your letter of 21 November on the situation in the Gaza Strip. As I informed you on the same day, rioting, instigated by Egyptian agents, took place in Rafah on 10 and 12 November. During the disorders the UNRWA Food Depot in the town was attacked by an unruly mob and the Israel authorities were compelled to take action to prevent large scale looting and destruction. Order was restored with some difficulty and, regrettably, there were casualties among the mob. Since then, however, complete tranquility prevails in the whole area, and relations between the local population and the authorities are amicable. . . In view, however, of your desire for direct information [about the situation in Gaza], the Government of Israel would welcome the visit of your personal representative who will be given all facilities to investigate and report on the situation in the area.

On November 23, 1956, the Israeli Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee met with IDF chief of staff Moshe Dayan to discuss the war and its conduct (see pp. 374–75). This is the relevant part of the transcript:

MK Yaakov Hazan: What about the treatment of prisoners? I don't mean those prisoners who are already in our hands. I don't believe in stories that someone heard from someone, but if someone comes to me and says that he himself saw something, then I have to believe him. I heard different stories about units that behaved humanely toward prisoners when they captured them, but I've also heard about brutal and inhumane treatment of prisoners in other units. Is anything known about this, and what is the army thinking of doing?

...

Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan: . . . I haven't heard any specific complaints about the treatment of prisoners after they were captured. Perhaps there were a few such incidents, I'll put the question to the head of [. . .] maybe he has information about complaints. They didn't reach me, but that doesn't mean it didn't happen.

. . .

Regarding Knesset Member Hazan's question about whether different units behaved differently toward prisoners—there was different treatment, I know about certain units in their encounters with prisoners in certain places or with fleeing Egyptians—I don't know of any instance where they stood prisoners in a row and killed them—killing them instead of taking them prisoner. I imagine that there were borderline cases, where the people could have been captured or killed and it depended on the particular inclination of the specific unit. In one unit they told them to line up, seized their weapons, and then took the people prisoner, and in another unit they opened fire on people when it was possible either to capture them or kill them.

MK Moshe Aram: . . . Knesset Member Hazan spoke about the handling of prisoners at the time they were taken. I'm sorry to say that I heard about the handling of prisoners during the time they were in the camps. I heard something very grave, that even now they're being beaten, and sometimes they're being abused in other ways. I see this as a political question, not a military one. Is there any kind of treatment being given to the prisoners beyond handing out their food rations? Is there any kind of spiritual treatment, because one of these days these people will go back to their countries. Is there any kind of treatment that will show them what kind of country this is, what kind of army, what this community is that they've fallen into?

. . .

What was the point of making it public that tear gas was sent to Rafah? It was even said somewhere that poison gas was sent, although Soviet channels immediately denied that voluntarily, but how and why was that made public?

What exactly happened in Rafah?

. . .

Chief of Staff M. Dayan: . . . I don't know of disturbances in Gaza and in the Strip. I think there's absolute quiet. I include Rafah in this, apart from the one incident. As long as the Egyptians were fighting there, they fought too. Once the matter was over, they quickly stopped fighting as well. The residents haven't shown any signs of resistance or lack of cooperation. I don't think they're planning any act of protest or physical resistance to our presence there.

I'm sure if the U.N. comes and asks them who they'd rather have there, they'd choose Arabs, but there's no physical expression of this. In Rafah there was a bit of an unfortunate convergence of events and the Arabs there had a negative disposition. The convergence was this. Our unit left the area during a changeover of units, the second unit hadn't yet entered the area. At the same time, the prime minister here was giving a speech about his answer to the U.N.'s demand for a withdrawal, and there they were sure that we'd left without intending to come

back. The second unit entered the next day and imposed a curfew and had to search the arms caches and the Egyptian soldiers who were still there. This had been done in other parts of Gaza, and until it was done neither the arms nor the Egyptian soldiers were handed over. Once the search took place, both the Egyptian soldiers and the arms were found. So we went from one area to the next until it was Rafah's turn.

MK Menachem Begin: How much time passed between the one unit leaving and the other coming in?

Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan: A night or a day. Basically, the clash didn't happen with the arrival of the second unit. Afterward, they announced a curfew on the loudspeakers and that all the men had to assemble at a specific place for identification. They ignored the curfew and no one came. The loudspeakers went around and announced the curfew and that the men had to assemble, and not only did they not show up but they paid no attention to the curfew instructions. There were a lot of Egyptian soldiers and a lot of arms among this big group of Arabs who weren't listening to the instructions, which is why I said that there was a certain disposition involved. So the unit opened fire. I don't know where they fired and whether the Arabs fired. I don't know the general picture. After the shooting started in a few places, the Arabs went into their homes and after that they responded to the order to come for identification, and then 200 Egyptian soldiers were found. About 40 people were killed. I'm sure that many hundreds of Egyptian soldiers could hide in the sands between Gaza [City] and Rafah, but if there are 200 soldiers in the houses who don't want to hand themselves over and are inciting the others not to identify themselves, then the unit commander was absolutely right when he opened fire. It's unacceptable that the army declares a curfew and people go on wandering in the streets.

MK Moshe Aram: Were those killed all soldiers?

Chief of Staff M. Dayan: I think one boy was injured, there were no women, only men. During the identification, the [Egyptian] soldiers weren't wearing uniforms, but when they were asked for their papers it became clear that they were soldiers.

The problem with the Arab population is external and political, not local. There are plenty of informers there. In Gaza and El-Arish there are also Egyptian agents and soldiers and Fedayeen who want to take action, but the others hand them over, not because of loyalty but because of the informers.

Minutes of the debate in the Knesset, November 28, 1956. Proposal by Knesset Member Esther Vilenska (Israeli Communist Party) to debate the events in the Gaza Strip.

We propose a debate in the Knesset plenum on the events that occurred in the Gaza Strip. Information has reached us from soldiers and residents in the Gaza Strip about looting, humiliation, and killings of the Arab population in different parts of the Gaza Strip. There has been extremely disturbing information that after Gaza was occupied, tens of residents were taken from their houses and shot

without cause. Even the meager information that the censor has allowed the Israeli press to publish shows that dreadful acts have been carried out in Gaza, acts which any person of conscience, regardless of party affiliation, cannot fail to condemn.

Today's *Ha'aretz* includes an article from *Ha'olam Haze'h*, which says, among other things, "Two weeks ago an event occurred in occupied Rafah, which, according to the international press, ended with the killing of more than fifty Arabs. With unsurpassable stupidity, this apparatus thinks that it's possible to silence such an event at a time like this in the most sensitive place on earth. That's why the first piece of information came from the UNRWA people who are there, who spoke of a horrific massacre. To the whole world Israel's silencing looks like an expression of bad conscience." That's from *Ha'olam Haze'h*.

The whole country has heard and is talking about these things. The Israeli public is ashamed of these acts and wants an immediate stop to them. There's no excusing these murderous acts in that they occurred during a time of war. These things were done after the occupation, to a peaceful population, just as on October 29 similar criminal acts were done to 49 peaceful residents of Kafr Kassem, acts that two weeks ago in the Knesset MK Schocken called "worse than treason."

[Just days before the Sinai war started, Kafr Kassem, a village of Arabs living inside Israel near Tel Aviv, was put under curfew by the Israel Border Police. Villagers returning home from their fields and neighboring areas, unaware that a curfew had been imposed, were stopped at the police roadblocks and killed.]

We protest these crimes not just from a general democratic standpoint but to an equal degree out of love for our people, out of a desire to erase a stain from our people. The government is responsible for these crimes just as it is responsible for its aggressive policy toward Egypt and its repressive policies toward the Arab population in Israel.

We propose a debate on the events in the Gaza Strip in order that the Knesset will decide 1) to condemn the acts of looting and murder that have been carried out by Israeli rule in the Gaza Strip, 2) to immediately halt these criminal acts; 3) to bring those who committed such acts to trial; 4) to carry out the United Nations' emergency decree to pull out IDF troops from all the occupied territory, including the Gaza Strip.

Prime Minister and Defense Minister David Ben-Gurion's reply (see p. 376):

I shall not debate with the two previous speakers [other speaker not identified]. It is not for them to talk of conscience, murder or robbery. I wish to report to the Knesset on the events which took place. The matter has already been discussed in the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, and a report has been sent to the Secretary General of the United Nations.

The following events took place at Rafah where there are both local residents and a number of refugees. Rafah was liberated by the Israel Defense Army which drove out the Egyptian invader—and I hope he will never return there.

On the day after my broadcast to the nation, on the evening of 11 November, Rafah had the mistaken impression that the Israel Defense Army was about to

withdraw from the town. Whether this false report was spread by the agents of these two speakers or others, I do not know—but that was the impression created. As a result, disturbances took place, UNRWA stores were looted, and shots were fired by the rioters. On the following day, during which the unit stationed in the town was due to be relieved—by another unit which was late in arriving—the disturbances began again. They did so after the unit stationed in the town had left. One officer and three soldiers who remained fired in the air and succeeded in dispersing the rioters. Later, the relieving unit arrived and imposed a curfew to carry out a weapons search, for we had information—and we still have information to this effect—that there were numerous Egyptian soldiers and Fedayeen in disguise still in the Gaza Strip, murderers sent there by the Egyptian dictator.

A number of people in the town violated the curfew and some opened fire on our forces. After firing a number of warning shots in the air, our soldiers were forced to open fire on the rioters and 48 of them were killed and a number were wounded. Searches were made and, as a result, 250 Egyptian soldiers and a large quantity of arms were discovered.

Since this incident, quiet has reigned in Rafah and in the whole of the Gaza area. Efforts have been made by the Israel Defense Army to restore normal life. Local councils have reopened, medical assistance has been provided, postal and telegraphic services and transport restored. Two representatives especially sent by the Secretary General of the United Nations visited Gaza yesterday and they will also visit other places. They were astonished that in a few days after the occupation such tranquility and normalcy prevail in the area.

On this occasion, I must refute the disgraceful slander being spread by Nasser's agents in Israel—they are also the agents of certain others, whose names I don't wish to mention for reasons sufficient for me—that the Government is preparing to do to the Arabs in Israel what Egypt is doing to the Jews in Egypt. This is a vile calumny and incitement of the worst possible kind, which only traitors and enemy agents could disseminate.

I wish to state here, if any need exists to make such a statement, that the Arab citizens of Israel enjoy full equality of civic rights. They are treated exactly like Jewish citizens, and none of us considers them responsible for the criminal misdeeds of the Arab rulers. The Government will take stringent legal measures against those who spread the slander, the purpose of which is to stir up unrest in this country. The Egyptian atrocities will not take place in Israel, and if any act of murder does take place, the murderers are handed over to the law and tried as though they had murdered Jews. For Israeli justice makes no distinction between Jewish and Arab murderers. Only foreign agents and traitors could spread such calumnies. I propose to remove this matter from the agenda.

[62 voted in favor of removing the matter from the agenda, 3 against.]

Ben-Gurion's reference to two U.N. representatives (Colonel K. Nelson and Captain G. Svedlund) being "astonished" at the level of "tranquility and normalcy" in Gaza raised eyebrows at U.N. headquarters. In a cable to UNTSO acting chief of staff Colonel Leary on November 28, 1956, Colonel Nelson wrote, "I made no specific or categorical statement to the effect that everything was OK in Gaza Strip. Yesterday I toured Gaza

town only repeat only. The Israelis may have concluded that my impression was that 'everything seems OK in Gaza' but I could not have said that everything was OK in Gaza Strip since I did not leave Gaza town. . . . The basis of Ben-Gurion's alleged statement is no categorical [*sic*] quoted from me. . . ." In a communication to the U.N. secretary general on December 1, 1956, after finally traveling around the Gaza Strip, Colonel Nelson was able to report, "Conditions throughout the area can be classified as progressively normal." Day-to-day life was "being restored under an orderly plan of Israeli authorities. . . . Method of Israeli [*sic*] may be strong arm but there is evidence of control of population and stability. . . . Situation in Rafia [*sic*] is calm for both refugee and local inhabitants."

The foundation for any historical account of the Khan Yunis and Rafah killings is the "Special Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (Covering the period 1 November 1956 to mid-December 1956)," presented to the General Assembly (Official Records: Eleventh Session, Supplement No. 14A A/3212/Add.1), New York, 1957 (see pp. 116–17 and 376).

Paragraphs 20 through 30, under the heading "Effects of Military Operations on Gaza Refugees," is the relevant section.

CASUALTIES AMONG REFUGEES

20. In addition to the disruptions referred to . . . , the occupation of the Gaza Strip by the Israel army resulted in a number of civilian casualties in both the refugee and local populations, and caused anxiety and fear among the refugees, particularly during the first weeks.
21. In other circumstances, it would have been a logical course for the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization to investigate and report upon casualties resulting from an armed attack across the demarcation line. In the present emergency, that organization was unable to do so, as the movements of its officers in the Gaza Strip had been restricted by the Israel authorities. The [United Nations Relief and Works] Agency has, therefore, made every effort to ascertain the facts concerning the various incidents affecting the refugees and it has sought to prevent any repetition of violence against the refugee population. The Agency has been compelled to rely upon its own sources of information. These were necessarily limited, but they included eye-witness accounts by UNRWA employees, both refugees and others.
22. The Director [of UNRWA, Henry Labouisse, an American] sets forth below a summary of the information he has obtained concerning refugee casualties, which he believes to be as accurate a reflection of the facts as prevailing circumstances permitted.
23. **Khan Yunis.** The town of Khan Yunis and the Agency's camp adjacent thereto were occupied by Israel troops on the morning of 3 November. A large number of civilians were killed at that time, but there is some conflict in the accounts given as to the causes of the casualties. The Israel authorities state that there was resistance to their occupation and that the Palestinian refugees formed part of the resistance. On the other hand, the refugees state that all resistance had ceased at the time of the incident and

that many unarmed civilians were killed as the Israel troops went through the town and camp, seeking men in possession of arms. The exact number of dead and wounded is not known, but the Director has received from sources he considers trustworthy lists of names of persons allegedly killed on 3 November, numbering 275 individuals, of whom 140 were refugees and 135 local residents of Khan Yunis.

24. **Rafah.** On 12 November, a serious incident occurred in the Agency's camp at Rafah. Both the Israel authorities and UNRWA's other sources of information agree that a number of refugees were killed and wounded at that time by the occupying forces.
25. A difference of opinion exists as to how the incident happened and as to the numbers of killed and wounded. It is agreed, however, that the incident occurred during a screening operation conducted by the Israel forces. These screening operations have been carried out in each UNRWA camp, as well as among the non-camp population. The stated purpose of the Israel authorities was to find persons who were members of the so-called "Palestine Brigade" or who participated in *fedayeen* operations. The procedure was to institute a twenty-four-hour curfew in the area being screened and to call all men between certain specified ages to gather at designated places; meanwhile, soldiers went through the houses and huts looking for suspects who might have remained at home.
26. The Israel authorities in Gaza state that the attitude of the refugees in Rafah camp was hostile and that there was some resistance to the screening operations, during which the casualties occurred. The refugees deny any such resistance. The facts appear to be as follows: Rafah is a very large camp (more than 32,000 refugees) and the loudspeaker vans which called upon the men to gather at designated screening points were not heard by some of the refugee population. Realizing this, an UNRWA official went personally to one section of the camp to inform the inhabitants of the Israel announcement. Moreover, sufficient time was not allowed for all men to walk to the screening points and get there before the designated hour. In the confusion, a large number of refugees ran toward the screening points for fear of being late, and some Israel soldiers apparently panicked and opened fire on this running crowd.
27. The Director has received from sources which he considers trustworthy lists of names of persons allegedly killed at Rafah on 12 November, numbering 111, of whom 103 were refugees, seven local residents, and one an Egyptian.

PROTEST BY THE AGENCY

28. Upon learning of the Rafah incident, the Agency protested to the Israel Government stating that, unless immediate measures were taken to put an end to such happenings, it would be impossible for UNRWA to continue its work among and on behalf of the refugees in the Gaza Strip. The Agency was assured by the Israel Foreign Office that the Government was taking urgent steps to establish the facts and was doing its best to ensure that there would be no repetition of such incidents.
29. To the best of the Agency's information, the two incidents mentioned above

are the only major ones of their kind which have taken place. There have been, however, a number of refugees killed or wounded in smaller incidents—some during the fighting, some in connexion with breaches of curfew restrictions, and some accidentally. The exact number is not known, but the Director has received a list, from sources which he considers trustworthy, numbering sixty-six individuals, of whom forty-eight were refugees, killed in the period 1 to 21 November (exclusive of those mentioned above).

30. It has not been possible to verify individually each listed death, nor has it been possible to complete a list of all refugees who may have been killed or who are missing. Further information may be obtained in the weeks to come, but it is most unlikely that lists of casualties can ever be made complete. One of the reasons for this is that, particularly in the early phase, many burials were made without identification.

Note here the references to eyewitness accounts, lists of casualties, and claims by Israeli authorities in Gaza. Presumably this material was written down. Perhaps these documents still exist and will be found by an intrepid researcher in the UNRWA archives—located mostly in Amman, Jordan—some day.

I asked Mordechai Bar-On, chef de bureau to Moshe Dayan in 1956, who was extensively interviewed for this book, specifically about the killings at Khan Younis and Rafah. Here is the relevant part of the transcript of the interview, which was conducted in English.

Q: Let's move forward a bit to the actual conquest of Gaza and to what happened in Khan Younis and Rafah.

Bar-On: What do you refer here to, Khan Younis, Rafah? I know of one case which I heard of and I didn't pursue it in great detail, of some, I think it was in Rafah, not in Khan Younis as far as I know, but it was in one place in which the commander, who happened to be in later years a great peacenik in Israel, Matti Peled. . . . But at that time he was the commander of a brigade, and he was commander of Gaza, so—

Q: He was the commander of all of Gaza? [Note: Matti Peled died in 1995.]

Bar-On: Of all Gaza . . . And don't trust this information because it's just what I remember, I never delved into that. . . . But there was some sort of a riot either in a refugee camp or in a prison camp. They tried to sort out the fedayeen or they tried to find those who were culprits of violent activities. And there was a kind of disorder in the place, and then there was [missing word] shooting on the part of the Israelis into the multitude. And as far as I remember something like 100 were killed, which is a great number. . . I know of one such place. I don't know what you referred [to], Khan Younis. . . . To me, to my mind, [the incident I'm aware of regarding Khan Younis] is the raid at the end of August of 1955. But maybe I'm wrong.

Q: So reports, when you were with Dayan, reports weren't really coming in about what was going on?

Bar-On: Reports from?

Q: *Reports on what was going on in Gaza. . . . Because you don't seem to be familiar with what happened in Khan Younis. I'm just wondering, at the time were reports coming in about what was going on in Gaza? Or is it something that . . . you learned later after the war?*

Bar-On: No no no. At the time, of course. But you have to try to imagine how it works.

Q: *Okay.*

Bar-On: If a thing like this happens, first of all you report by telephone. Not by any writing. So it's word of mouth. I mean, they report it to the area command, and the area command reports to the G3, to the operation room . . . if it's important. In this case I guess it was important enough to let Dayan know right away, even by telephone. [The report] will not be of great detail. You do not ask him, how did it happen? . . . Somebody will tell there was a riot in the camp, and we had to open fire, and many were killed, but it's now quiet. Because the whole thing took perhaps a few minutes. The whole event—or maybe half an hour, and then the whole thing was over. So it's over now. . . . Then you've got investigations. Sometimes legal investigations, but very often the upper echelon demands a written report on what happened. So the report will then go by echelon and will reach—in most cases Dayan would not read that report. [It will arrive] two or three days later, and sometimes a week later. There were so many other things to busy himself with. . . . Actually, he knew the facts, he knew the facts exactly the way, what happened. Unless he thought it was something that had to be investigated by a lawyer, by a military lawyer, which he did not, I think, at that time. Then I would remember it much more. I don't remember it much more because for me it was a fleeting event. Somebody told me, I told Dayan, and that's it, finished, the story is over.

Q: *I mean, it is a long time ago. Do you remember how you heard about it?*

Bar-On: No . . .

Q: *But you would have been the one to have told Dayan then?*

Bar-On: I'm not sure. Maybe someone called him directly. And he told me . . .

Q: *And you don't know if a report was written about it or not?*

Bar-On: I'm pretty sure that there was a written report. . . .

Q: *And as far as you know, what happened in Khan Younis, you just don't even remember any—*

Bar-On: It's either there or there. You know, some reports . . . do not register with us, because what registered with me is a case in which 100 Palestinians are being killed, women and children, within an hour, that [registered with] me. The fact that there was some shooting in some place and two Palestinians were killed, would not record in my memory—sadly about my memory. But for them it's another case. And of course, the Palestinians, and I don't blame [them] for that, but the Palestinians have a tendency to inflate those stories because it serves them so they want to inflate them. Now sometimes they don't have to inflate because a hundred killed is a hundred killed.

Q: I'll tell you, it wasn't women and children. There might have been some women and children killed, but it was [almost all] men. Just so you know.

Bar-On: Anyway, they make the best out of these stories, especially over the years the story goes and becomes bigger and bigger. The memory becomes bigger and bigger. We have this experience, and it's only natural. So what you hear from people on the locale, you have to . . . take with a grain of salt, because they might report a truthful story, but [exaggerate] the way they tell [it] and the details. In my mind, I know only one mishap or one act of cruelty, if you might call it, or misdeed, and I know of one such case [where] Matti Peled was involved. There were many more—Palestinians were killed here and there over that period. I don't know if it was—I think it was Khan Younis, not in Rafah. So I do not know what do they refer to when they say another event in Rafah.

There is one intriguing reference to the killings in Khan Younis by Israeli professor of philosophy Avishai Margalit in his review of Noam Chomsky's *The Fateful Triangle* (*New York Review of Books*, June 28, 1984). In it, he states:

Take the case of the massacre at Khan Younis in the Gaza Strip during the war of 1956, one of many unpublicized cases of Israeli brutality that Chomsky mentions. Israel was involved, according to the UN chief inspector, General E.L.M. Burns, in the massacre of at least 275 people. This number is cited by Chomsky although knowledgeable Israeli sources I have talked to believe it is too high. What is missing from this account, however, is the fact that each of the persons who were shot was identified as a *fedayeen* (or terrorist, in Israel's current jargon) according to lists compiled by Israeli intelligence before the killings. Execution without trial is evil, as is the mindless slaughter of innocents by Israelis at Deir-Yassin or by Phalangists at Sabra and Shatila.

In a response in the letters page of the *New York Review of Books* (August 16, 1984), Chomsky stated his sources for the casualty figure at Khan Younis (citing the director of UNRWA, Henry Labouisse) and added that "the official Israeli account" and other reports "denied" that those shot had been identified as *fedayeen*. "In fact," wrote Chomsky, "it seems that the army simply went on a rampage after the conquest." Margalit replied:

In my view bureaucratic murder according to pre-prepared lists and without trial is as evil as murder committed by rampaging soldiers hitting innocent civilians. It is no less evil: it is a different evil.

ADDITIONAL NOTES ON SOURCES

- p. 36: The Israel Foreign Ministry report cited is from its Middle East department. I found it in Tom Segev's book 1949: *The First Israelis*.
- pp. 77–78: Dayan's eulogy for Ro'i Rothberg is quoted from Benny Morris's book *Israel's Border Wars, 1949–1956*.
- pp. 118–119: Mark Gefen's account of the Khan Younis killings was published in *Al Hamishmar*, April 27, 1982. Riva Hocherman translated the article from the Hebrew.

APPENDIX 2

THE DEMOLITION OF HOMES IN RAFAH: THE ISRAELI VIEW

In May 2003 I interviewed Israel Defense Forces spokespersons and commanders for their comments on the home demolitions in Rafah. What follow are the relevant portions of the transcripts.

Major Sharon Feingold and Captain Jacob Dallal, IDF spokespersons:

Feingold: What concerns us most is the tunnels—this is the biggest problem for us along that border. You have to understand that when we talk about these tunnels, this is a conglomerate, this is an operation, this is a business. . . . For the last two and a half years these tunnels have been used to smuggle both wanted terrorists and weapons and munitions. And . . . we're talking about dozens of tunnels. . . . The average is about 15 meters deep and 300 and 400 meters long. . . . Now they can't dig them out in the open, of course. They would be spotted in seconds. So what they do is they dig them . . . from houses which are closest to the border, which means the tunnels are shorter in length. Most of these structures along the border . . . are used as piers for tunnels. What we [do] is expose the tunnels. After we expose the tunnels we blow them up. So [the Palestinians] move further and further into Rafah itself to dig the tunnels. . . .

Q: *What sort of coordination do you have with the Egyptians on this?*

Feingold: I can't go into that, that's very sensitive, but I can tell you that the Egyptians are doing everything they can to fight this phenomenon from their side. . . . [M]ore than 100 tunnels [have been] exposed. We blow them up, they dig another tunnel. It's a game of, if you want, cat and mouse going after these people. And because they dig the tunnels from people's houses, it's very hard for us to detect these tunnels. Look at this. [She shows a photo on a computer.] This is a tunnel which was dug under the baby's cot, inside a house. This is a normal house in Rafah. You can see it's quite a wealthy house. And this is the pier for the tunnel, under the baby's bed. . . . [It] is not something out of the ordinary. This is what we're facing every single day in Rafah. . . . [T]hese tunnels are the arteries of terror. These tunnels are the ones supplying bullets, the AK-47s, the anti-tank rockets—the RPGs—and people, wanted terrorists.

Q: *I'd like to get a sense of . . . the threat that, from your perspective, the tunnels pose.*

Feingold: Oh, a very big one. [Shows a map of Rafah's border area.] They use these structures. Some of them are abandoned, some of them are not. Some of them have roofs. Some of them do not. Some of them are used as places where they keep their farm animals, you know, the chickens and the goats and

whatever. And in some of them the people are still living, [on the] first floor or the second floor. . . .

Q: *You mentioned a number of things that have been smuggled through. Go over that again. What is generally smuggled through as far as arms or ammunition?*

Feingold: Anything that you can get into the tunnel. It's very easy. When we destroy more tunnels we see that the price for an AK-47 automatic rifle rises from \$1,000 to \$2,000. You see by the market in Rafah, you see how good we are. Which is quite funny, but it's not funny to us. Basically, these tunnels are not very big. You have to be very small to crawl inside. But there are tunnels which we have discovered which are big, where they had lights in there, where they had a telephone system in there. People could actually walk. . . . We also don't know how many tunnels there are. . . . We do know that they use children to dig the tunnels . . . and pay them very low salaries. . . .

Dallal: In general, the whole question of children, also to lay explosive devices on the border, on the Philadelphi Road itself.

Feingold: They send them because they're small, because children are not something that should raise any suspicion. . . . They run there all the time.

Q: *And the evidence you have of that is what?*

Feingold: We have intelligence that shows that. . . . We know for a fact that they're using children all the time. . . . They send them to try to infiltrate the [Jewish] settlements inside the Gaza Strip. They're not that successful, but some of them have been. We caught a child that's eight years old and 14, if I'm not mistaken. . . .

Q: *Eight and 14?*

Dallal: Those are the youngest.

Feingold: The youngest that we caught, which managed to go, to infiltrate one of our settlements. They were caught.

Q: *And you say the children are also used to plant explosive devices?*

Dallal: [They] actually go up to the border road and leave things. I remember I was there, this was a while back when this happened, but they would see a child put a bag there, a brown bag, and walk away, along the road. And that was a sort of a small explosive device, and [the IDF] would deactivate it . . . later. And what can you do, also, when you see the children do things that are suspicious, we can't shoot, we don't shoot at them. There's nothing we can do. . . . They see it from the outpost, they know children [are] coming forward doing things that look suspicious, digging, leaving things, and also . . .

Feingold: Yep. It's a big problem. And interestingly enough . . . the residents of Rafah organized themselves and they [put] ads in newspapers there [saying], "Stop using our houses, stop using our children. . . ."

Q: *I've seen a number of times homeowners yelling at people with guns, "Get away from my home." Obviously, as you must know, there are a lot of people who don't have tunnels, and who don't want their homes destroyed.*

Feingold: That's something that has to be very clear. Our war is not against the Palestinian people. . . .

Q: *But what would you tell someone, a homeowner who's losing his home, whose home is getting bulldozed, who doesn't have a tunnel. . . .*

Feingold: We don't bulldoze someone's house if we don't have good reason to do that. We only bulldoze a house when that house is used either for intelligence gathering, or shooting [at] our forces, or as a cover for people who are planting explosive devices, or used by the tunnel smugglers. . . . In this asymmetric battle . . . it's not like the old conventional wars where you fight a soldier or you use a tank attack. Here we're fighting a battle of silhouettes and shadows. These people are not wearing uniforms. They're wearing civilian clothes. They assimilate themselves inside a civilian population. They use the civilian population. When you dig a tunnel under a baby's cot, you know fully well that when Israeli [soldiers] will find that tunnel, they will destroy the house. They're actually holding the people of this house hostage. These people are afraid of them. . . .

Q: *So you think some of these homes are used against the homeowner's [wishes]?*

Feingold: I'm sure that they are, I'm sure that they are. And this is tragic. These people are paying a price. . . . They have nothing to do with terror. They wish to live peacefully. . . . But we can't allow this. . . . And people publish ads in the newspaper saying don't use us as hostages, or go away from our neighborhood, it means that they got the message, our message. . . .

Q: *Now you mentioned a number of things that a house could be destroyed for, but according to the Governorate of Rafah, more than seven hundred dwellings or homes have been destroyed along the border.*

Feingold: No . . . I think that's a big exaggeration. I'm not sure that we can share with you all the statistics that we have. I have to ask you, what is a house?

Dallal: Yeah, exactly.

Feingold: What is a house? Is it four walls . . . ?

Dallal: A shed?

Feingold: Where you keep your chickens and your goats? These are not houses in the Western norm . . . with a family. . . .

Dallal: Are they inhabited? That's the other question. If the gunmen have been using them for six months and no one lives there, is that inhabited? Is the house built? Is that a house? And the other thing, all these [things] that [Major Feingold] was explaining to you for the reason why—When a house is used to conduct terror [it can be destroyed]. . . .

Feingold: Under the Geneva Conventions. . . .

Dallal: [As far as any house listed by the Rafah governorate] it could be a shed, it could be a half-built structure, it could be an uninhabited structure. . . .

Feingold: A few tens, a few dozens . . .

Q: *So a few dozen [houses destroyed] from your standpoint?*

Feingold: I would say not even close to [the hundreds mentioned]. And again, these structures we do go after, we do that for a reason. We don't just go there, you know, because we have nothing better to do. It's because we located a house that's been used by the gunmen for the last two months or for the last two weeks. And it could have been used by the gunmen. . . .

Dallal: [Motions to a map and shows houses that are marked as being used by gunmen.] These are standing structures, and these are places in this particular area, the red is: grenades come from those houses, and pink: fire has been shot from those places—regularly. And these are the things that are standard.

Q: *You mentioned uninhabited homes. I'll just tell you from the . . . Palestinian perspective. They say they're fired at by the IDF—their home—just randomly. In other words, bullets just come in every now and then into their home. And after a while it just becomes too dangerous for them. They move out of the home, and they try to visit it during the day. And at this point it becomes abandoned or semi-abandoned. And then they feel they've sort of lost it. And I've even seen Palestinians who've boarded up their homes so that no one can use it to shoot from even though they're not actually living in it. Because they don't want their homes to be demolished.*

Feingold: Obviously not. The accusation that we shoot randomly is absolute nonsense. We understand that the battle that's being conducted against terror—inside these houses there are children and women . . . but when these houses are used to shoot anti-tank rockets at our soldiers—this is a war zone. . . . I don't know any soldier anywhere around the world who's been shot at and will not fire at the source of fire. . . . And as [Captain Dallal] said, once the house is used for combat activity it ceases to become a house. Under the Geneva Convention, it can be targeted. . . . We are only firing at people who are firing at us. . . . It's very sad that these people have to leave their houses. It's very sad. But why are they having to leave their houses? . . . [T]hese people who are in charge of the tunnels are very unhappy when we explode their tunnels. . . . It's an economic operation. Once we cut into their profits they become very agitated, very angry. They are determined to keep this area a combat zone. . . . As in every war, innocent people, bystanders, who have absolutely nothing to do with terror, are paying the price. . . .

Later, Captain Dallal told me that about 45 inhabited homes had been demolished by the IDF to date (May 2003) in Rafah.

Colonel "Pinky" (nickname given) commander of the IDF Southern Brigade of the Gaza Strip Division:

Q: *Let me ask you, do you have a figure of how many homes have been demolished? If you have a permit or permission to destroy every house, you must have a figure for it. Is that available? An IDF figure?*

Pinky: Approximately, I believe that we have destroyed between 300 to 400 houses, and if you check it you'll have the right number. . . . One of the most important things in guerrilla warfare is to learn and to prepare yourself for the next battle, and the next battle could be on the same day. But right now, you know, so many events. So you lose the time, you lose the day, you lose the events. If you ask me how many terrorists my brigade killed in the last year, I don't have the number anymore. In the beginning you count them, but if you go to the

books, there is the number of the terrorists that we killed, we got the number of structures we've demolished, we've got everything.

Q: *Let me ask you, from the Palestinian point of view, you've got people who say their homes are hit randomly by gunfire. What's your comment on something like that?*

Pinky: . . . It's a fighting zone.

Q: *They say there's no gunfire from their areas sometimes yet their houses are hit.*

Pinky: It's very easy to say something like this because you can never have the evidence to show that no one shoots from there. Because I can give you examples where they claim that we kill people and we hit people and when you are checking in the hospital, there is no one that arrived to the hospital. I can give you events that they claim that we killed someone and we don't have the name, we don't have nothing, even the place. It's not the place where my soldier was shooting. And I told you sometimes we make mistakes and shoot, but if I investigate every event—I don't want to say all the events—but most of the events when we hit places that we're not supposed to hit, it was by mistake. You don't see that soldiers have an aim to hit innocent citizens. You don't have something like this that you can show me and claim that there are people here who are bad people, bad soldiers. And I admit that sometimes when you are shooting here, there are stray bullets that hit in the wrong targets.

Q: *Now as far as the house demolitions are concerned, I've talked to people whose houses have been demolished who will say there's definitely no tunnel, that they argue with gunmen, they want gunmen to leave their area because they don't want their homes to be demolished, and their homes are demolished anyway.*

Pinky: I hear about this claim, and I know that sometimes maybe we demolished the wrong house. But in most of the cases, I told you, I cannot demolish a house without having a permit to do it. And what's happened, you know, it's like a process. . . . [Some Palestinians] are not going to admit and say that sometimes the gunmen get inside the house and shoot from the houses in the times they were there. And sometimes when people try to resist these kind of people, they shoot [at] them, in the leg. . . . And you know, you're American. Go and see what's happening in the world. I think that, if you check us, and look at our behavior, when people shoot anti-tank missiles at my soldiers, and you have here all the snipers, and you have here all the booby traps, and you will see how much damage we did, you will see that we are very very gentle, if you can say gently about something like this. But when there is [a chance] that my soldier is going [to be] hit by the terrorist, there is only one solution for me: it's to hit the targets and to destroy whatever is creating the situation to be bad [for] my soldier. You can come with me to visit the Cohen family now. I'm going to let them know how their son was killed. And one of the things that they ask—and we are talking about Khan Younis—why did you let the houses that our son was killed from . . . to be established—you didn't destroy it before our son was killed—from this house. So what are you going to say to this mother?

Q: *What do you say?*

Pinky: I say that I'm a soldier, a professional soldier, and I obey the rules. And

there are international rules, and it means if I want to destroy something or demolish something, it means I need to have a permit. And as long as we obey the rules, we are not going to destroy and kill people and demolish structures that do not have [a] connection with the terror operation. And unfortunately the house that [Cohen] was killed from—the sniper shot from this house—was demolished only after it happened. Because before [that], we did not have any evidence that [gave] us the option to demolish this house. . . . We brought the family to the post where he was killed . . . and they were very angry [that] we didn't destroy . . . the neighborhood.

Q: *You're talking about the Toufieh area? . . .*

Pinky: You understand where the post [is]?

Q: *Yes, I know exactly, I know Toufieh quite well.*

Pinky: You see I don't demolish houses there without reason. But if you take what's happened there in Toufieh, I'm sure other armies would destroy all the neighborhood through [to] the hospital.

Q: *All the way up to the hospital?*

Pinky: For sure. Go to Chechnya.

Q: *Oh yeah, well, the Russians.*

Pinky: So you see we are really gentle when we are picking the targets, and we try not to . . . hit the innocent people. I really feel bad about this. But when you take the families, the soldiers, that I [have] responsibility for, there is no option for me as a commander to let them be killed by this opportunity that I give to the other side. And the other side knows it. They know my rules of engagement, and they use it, and they use it in a cynical way, in the fact that they use the families, the innocent people as human shields, and it makes me sorry. . . .

Q: *Let me ask you one more question, and again about house demolitions along the border. It seems like this is gradually going north. Is there a point where this is going to stop or is it just going to keep creeping north, the demolitions, until you feel you're under no threat at all? When does that stop? Is there a limit on this?*

Pinky: When they will stop to shoot on my troops. This is the answer. If I will feel, and I will see, that there is no resistance, and there is no shooting, and there is no risk to my troops. . . . [T]he moment that I understand that they use [a house] to hit my soldiers, I'm there, I'm there. So the only thing that leads me is the confidence and the safety of my soldiers. We don't have [a plan] to destroy Rafah. It's not our aim. We want the smuggling from the tunnels [to] be stopped, we want the conducting of terror operations in this area [to] be stopped. . . .

Lieutenant Colonel "Avi" [full name not given], commander of the IDF Desert Patrol Battalion; Lieutenant "Erez" also present:

Q: *So are you responsible for the border area and Rafah?*

Avi: Yes . . .

Q: *So how would you characterize the responsibilities of your battalion?*

Avi: To guard the international border. . . . Nowadays this means that you have Egypt on one side, Palestinians on the other side, and in between them a corridor which is Israeli. And I'm responsible for this corridor. . . . Until the intifada began, our major activities were just kind of random patrols and random searches. It wasn't nearly as intense. We would find illegal cigars, once in a while drugs, but it was pretty light operations in terms of our patrolling this border, until the intifada began. . . . When the war began and they began to focus their activities, the Palestinians realized that their major source of contraband was being cut off, and they built hundreds of more tunnels, and the tunnels became designated—these are the tunnels for Hamas, these are the tunnels for Fatah, these are the tunnels for Islamic Jihad. . . . This is a war front. It's a central war zone. It has been and still is the front that has the most number of incidents of any place in Israel. . . .

Q: *I realize you can't tell me in specific terms how you know [where] there is a tunnel, but can you give me a general idea?*

Avi: I get intelligence information that there is a tunnel. I don't know exactly where. I begin to dig, not in a built-up area, like where there's homes, rather in the corridor, the Israeli corridor. I put dynamite inside the ground. This is the initial explosion. If I [hit near] a tunnel, the tunnel sucks all the [earth above] inside. And it . . . automatically [traces] a line, shows you on the surface of the earth the line that the tunnel is following.

Q: *Oh, I see, it just sort of collapses.*

Avi: It points to where they are going. It follows the line all the way to the house. . . .

Q: [Referring to a map of Rafah on the wall.] *Can I ask you, the Xs indicate what and the dots indicate what, the red dots?*

Avi: Red is [for] homes that people live in, and black [is for] empty homes. The numbers are mosques. . . . [We document with] recorded footage, every tunnel. Because they constantly claim that we're destroying homes, and we're killing people, innocent civilians, we put a photographer with us at all times. . . . We don't just randomly destroy homes. Every home that on the other side that they say we destroyed, every single home has a history. Either they fired on our troops from there—RPGs, anti-tank fire—or there was a tunnel.

Q: *So you have a record here of every home and its history, then?*

Avi: On the intelligence level of the division for pretty much every house we have the information.

Q: *The colonel described to me the permission process for destroying a home. Can you go over that with me, too?*

Avi: I get information saying that such-and-such tunnel was dug from such-and-such location. That's the first process. . . . Once I find a tunnel, I know what direction it's coming from, I then gather intelligence and information [on] the home, the home that built the tunnel, do people live in [it] or is it vacant? . . . There is a project plan, the project plan goes to [Colonel "Pinky," who] sends the

project plan above him to the commander of the area, and the commander of the area sends it all the way up to the legal advisor for the entire army. They either approve it or they don't approve it. There are times they turn me down because the exit of the tunnel is in an area where to destroy it we'd have to destroy many homes, it's in a very crowded area so they say instead of destroying the home, destroy the tunnel itself, the complete tunnel. . . . The best way to do it in the end is to go to the entrance, or the exit, however you want to look at it, the entrance, we'll say, from the Palestinian side, and destroy the entrance. It's not my decision in the end. I have to go through this whole process.

Q: How often is it turned down?

Avi: Very very frequently. . . . The problem is that they know we're going after the first row of homes so they simply keep moving the entrance of the tunnels deeper and deeper into the camps. Which means if we want to go to the opening, we have to [go] further and further . . . into the camps. And we will go everywhere. Everywhere we have to go, we will go.

Q: In the final analysis, do you feel your efforts have been very effective with the tunnels, or do you feel like you keep finding more, which indicates that the Palestinians keep pushing it?

Avi: We're very very successful. I go in with my Hummer and speak to the Palestinian population. . . . When I go in, I make an announcement on the loudspeakers telling everyone to get out of the area. After we deal with the problem, we distribute flyers . . . saying, "People, if there are no tunnels, we're not coming in here. If you build tunnels, we are coming in here. So don't build tunnels. Protect your homes." I speak to many people over there. . . . I know them, I speak to them.

Q: When you say you speak to them, do you actually get out of your vehicle . . . ?

Avi: I move in my Hummer. . . . I'm protected by the Hummer. I see people, I call them over to me, and I speak to them.

Q: And basically you tell them no tunnels, no problem?

Avi: I speak to them about the situation, about everything. I explain to them why this is happening. Their greatest concern is to explain to me that they're not the ones involved. They're like apologetic almost. They just can't control it, they say. . . . We're in a defensive situation, not an offensive situation. They who bring us inside, cause us to fight, are the terrorist units. That's why we enter. All the times that we go in are because of the terrorist units or because of the tunnels. . . .

Q: Why do you think . . . homes [are] abandoned then? Because they were once inhabited.

Avi: I showed you the map. You asked me about the Xs, the black and red. I work here every day, 24 hours a day. . . . I know where they live and where they don't live, who lives there. I know the father of the home, his children.

Q: Just with your intelligence?

Avi: From my eyes, because I'm here constantly. They built their homes before the war. People were living in them. When the war started, people fled their

homes. Not because we came into the homes, but because the other side started using their homes for military operations. They didn't want to get killed. So that's why they left their homes.

Q: I have to put this to you. I've spoken to Palestinians. They say they leave their homes because bullets come into their homes from the Israeli side. They say that after a while it's just too dangerous.

Avi: I understand everything you're saying, and I agree that bullets come in. But bullets come in because they're firing at us from those homes. Either from the homes or from the area of the homes. When we know it's a populated house, we do our utmost to not fire into a populated house. And in the end of the day, the owner of the house weighs up his options. If he's in an area where there's fighting around, whether it's from the Israeli side or the Palestinian side, if it's too dangerous . . . there, he leaves.

Q: When you say "area of the house," what do you mean?

Erez: [Showing a photo of homes.] An area of a home, we mean by that, if we're talking about 575, for example [the home is numbered], the area is from this wall or from this bush or from the windows.

Q: In other words the immediate area of the home, that's what I want to get at, the yard of the home, from behind the home.

Erez: Yeah, of course . . .

Q: You know, those are pretty much my questions, unless you think there's something you should tell me.

Avi: I'll tell you just one thing. I'm a father of two girls, I have a family, and I have a home. And I know what it is to have a home. Every place I go into I think ten times, one hundred times, should I go inside. But in every place, if there is danger to my soldiers, or if there's a dangerous situation, whether they're bringing in arms and weapons, I'll go in and take care of the situation. It's too bad that the other side, I'm talking about the population of the other side, it's too bad they don't understand after I've been here for two years, I don't understand after two years being here how the other side has not succeeded to kick out the minority that exists there that causes all the suffering.

APPENDIX 3

THE DEMOLITION OF ASHRAF'S HOME

Ashraf's house was finally and completely demolished by the Israeli army on May 17, 2003, after I had finished researching this book.

As it happened, I was back in Rafah at the time on assignment for the *New York Times Magazine*, writing about the smuggling tunnels connecting Palestinian to Egyptian Rafah. Abed and I were sitting with a representative of the governorate of Rafah going over the subject of home demolitions when Ashraf called, telling us to get down to the Block J area because the Israelis were again demolishing homes.

On our way there we ran into Ashraf's brother, who told us, "They demolished the whole house." Here is my truncated journal entry about the incident:

He's all smiles, all but giggly. You want to see? We turn down the sandy path, we can see the Zorob [tower], we've been hearing gunshots, we peer around a building; again, it's hard to get your bearings when you're looking at a landscape absent of something, and in this case what is absent is Ashraf's house. All I can see is dirt piled up. The brother explains that the bulldozers pushed sand and debris up on the house from two sides and that collapsed the structure. . . . I ask Ashraf's brother how he feels about what's happened. He doesn't seem particularly upset. "Now we are sure," he says. "Before it was in-between..."

We got to Ashraf's home. His father is vaguely smiling. And then Ashraf steps out. . . . Ashraf has draped his arm over Abed. . . . "Life is fucking us," says Ashraf. "It's like shit."

Ashraf's dad, Talil, told me, "Yes, now it's finished. Now I should think about starting something new." Surveying the landscape, reduced to debris and sand, he said, "It was the nicest area in Rafah. Couples that were engaged used to come here to walk. Between day and night it became a ruin. . . . This is a disaster. This is a new migration."

A few days later, I spoke to the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel "Avi" (quoted at length in Appendix 2), who was responsible for the operation that destroyed Ashraf's house. My IDF minder, Captain Doron, was also present.

Q: Three days ago I was in Rafah, and I saw . . . homes demolished. . . . It was west of Block J.

[We refer to the maps to determine the area in concern. Avi shows images of a bulldozer with damage to its bullet-proof glass.]

. . .

Avi: If you look from those homes to the Egyptian side you'll see a cement wall of the Israelis blocking your view. There's an opening there. There's an opening between that cement, which is the area [from which] we enter [to conduct operations in Rafah]. This is a bullet-proof tractor. He entered into that area to close that opening. Two days before this, there were people who exited through that area, terrorists, who were going to leave the Gazan side, go into Egypt, go all the way down south and [from there back into Israel]. Because of that I wanted to close the opening. . . . The bulldozer entered, and look at the results: There are a huge number of direct bullet hits on the vehicle.

Q: Was this at night?

Avi: In the day. At night we had the people going into Egypt from the Gazan side, and the next day we went to close the [opening]. . . .

Q: I just want to be sure we're talking about the same thing. This happened, I think it was Saturday, when the homes were demolished.

Avi: Yes. These were not homes that people lived in. These were deserted homes that people were firing on our troops from. And from these homes they constantly fired at us. So from three different directions they hit the vehicle, from every side window and from the front.

Q: So gunmen were confirmed firing from those homes?

Doron: Yeah, that's it.

Avi: We are positive those homes were deserted.

[Later, the subject of the bulldozing of Ashraf's and other homes came up again.]

Avi: On Shabbat, the incident you spoke about that Saturday, there were terrorists involved in this action. They were firing from the homes. You call this a home, we call this a military position. It's an empty home, a vacant home that no family is living in. There's nothing inside the house that would make it a home. It's not connected to water or electricity. . . . It's a military position [that] fires at us.

APPENDIX 4

PALESTINIAN FIGURES FOR HOMES DEMOLISHED

The day after Ashraf's home was destroyed, I accompanied the Palestinian officials sent to assess and document the extent of the damage wrought by the Israeli bulldozers. Besides Ashraf's, three other houses were confirmed demolished and two were reportedly demolished and needed to be checked on.

While we were doing our inspection, a man stepped up to tell the officials that his home had been destroyed, too. "There were four rooms," he insisted. "You don't believe me?" "It's not a matter of believing you or not," one of the local government's officials, an engineer, replied. "Come to the governorate. Bring the documents about your house, the plans."

The assessments of the engineer and representatives of Rafah's Distribution Center and the Ministry of Housing were important in determining who would get compensated for what. The governorate was responsible for compensating non-refugee households; UNRWA was responsible for compensating refugees. There was coordination between the two organizations, but their figures for homes demolished were slightly different due to different counting methods.

UNRWA counted each building as one house, no matter how many housing units it contained. The governorate counted all housing units as individual houses. For example, a demolished multi-story building that contained three separate apartments would be counted by UNRWA as one house but by the governorate as three.

UNRWA (with the lower figures) counted 459 refugee and 94 non-refugee homes completely demolished in Rafah from September 2000, the start of the Second Intifada, until May 2003, when I last visited. A further 72 houses were considered partially destroyed and unsafe. The total of homes that had been damaged but could be repaired was 883.

In the same period, UNRWA had built 97 replacement homes.

According to UNRWA, in Rafah, up to April 2003, 4,781 people from 874 families had their homes completely demolished.

When I mentioned to Isa Qarra, public information officer for the Gaza Field Office of UNRWA, who gave me the above figures, that an IDF spokesman claimed that only about 45 inhabited houses in Rafah had been destroyed, he said, "I have no comment. These are the numbers we have."

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For the big-picture sweep of events—political, diplomatic, and military—leading up to and beyond the 1956 Suez Canal Crisis I relied on two books, Kennett Love's *Suez: The Twice-Fought War* (McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1969) and Donald Neff's *Warriors at Suez* (The Linden Press/Simon & Schuster, 1981). By placing the Gaza raid of February 28, 1955, in their respective first chapters, both authors helped me understand its centrality in the context of what happened in Khan Younis and Rafah in November 1956.

For the Israeli point of view, I turned to Tom Segev's *1949: The First Israelis* (Owl Books/Henry Holt and Company, 1998) and Benny Morris's *Israel's Border Wars: 1949–1956* (Oxford University Press, 1993). Despite his right-wing politics and slant, Morris is considered an objective historian and a careful examiner of archival records. I relied on his book in particular for insight into Israeli responses to border incidents and the fedayeen campaigns. I quote from his figures for Israeli and “infiltrator” casualties. Morris was gracious enough to meet me in Jerusalem when I needed tips on approaching the Israeli historical record.

My other two important Israeli sources were Mordechai Bar-On's *The Gates of Gaza* (St. Martin's Press, 1994) and Moshe Dayan's *Diary of the Sinai Campaign* (Schocken Books, 1967). Mordechai Bar-On was personally very helpful to me, and my interview with him figures prominently in this book.

For the U.N. perspective on the events of the time, I relied on Lieutenant General E. L. M. Burns's *Between Arab and Israeli* (George G. Harrap & Co, 1962). Burns was the chief of staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) and later the commander of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF).

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A number of Israelis—former military men, families of deceased military men, and historians—were contacted to see if more light could be shed on the events in Khan Younis and Rafah in 1956. Both Meron Rapoport, my researcher, and I spoke to Mordechai Bar-On and to Lieutenant Colonel Meir Pa'il, former commander of the 51st Battalion of the Golani Brigade, which was active in the Rafah area. In addition,

Meron spoke to Zvi Al-Peleg, a former governor of the northern Gaza Strip; the family of the late Matti Peled, military commander of the Gaza Strip; and the family of Lieutenant Colonel Haim Gaon. I consulted historians Benny Morris, Ilan Pappé, and Uri Milstein, among others. Meron talked to Uri Avnery, ex-chief editor of the weekly *Ha'olam Hazeḥ*, former Knesset member, writer, and historian, and Professor Avishai Margalit, whose comments on Noam Chomsky's *The Fateful Triangle* are noted in Appendix 1.

A NOTE ON NAMES, PORTRAITS, AND INTERVIEWS

Most of the people I interviewed for this book agreed to give their full names. Some wished to remain anonymous. Others gave partial names, and in those cases I have stuck to whatever portion they preferred to use.

For the portraits, I worked from photographs for most of the interviewees. In the cases of people who did not wish to be identified, I generally drew quick sketches to approximate the look of the individual without rendering him or her identifiable. Where a name is indicated but there is no portrait at all, the likely explanation is that my camera malfunctioned.

Regarding language, I have tried to be faithful to the words people used when they were interviewed, even though it meant reproducing choppy word choices. Where a reader might have been left confused, I have smoothed the language somewhat, though as little as necessary.

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Hani and Khaled, two characters in the book, were also very helpful in introducing me to their communities in Rafah and Khan Younis.

As I cannot speak Hebrew, I had the help of two Israeli researchers, Oshri Netev and especially Meron Rapoport, in digging into Israeli archives. Meron also contacted a number of Israelis who figured significantly in the 1956 story, or, if deceased, their families.

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